Issue 58 • December 16 1989

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- High class DTP
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ST
- Stacey hands-on test
- 520STE hits shops
- PC emulator on trial

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- Works 2 reviewed
- Deluxe Paint update
- Die Hard adaptation

CPC
- Executive suite
- Op Wolf II in action

BBC
- Musical expansion

ARC•C64•MSX
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SPECTRUM•QL

SPECIALIST COLUMNS

AMIGA: IT'S JUST NOT FAIR

NEW TWIST IN 16-BIT SALES WAR

Atari cries foul at Commodore's sales claims

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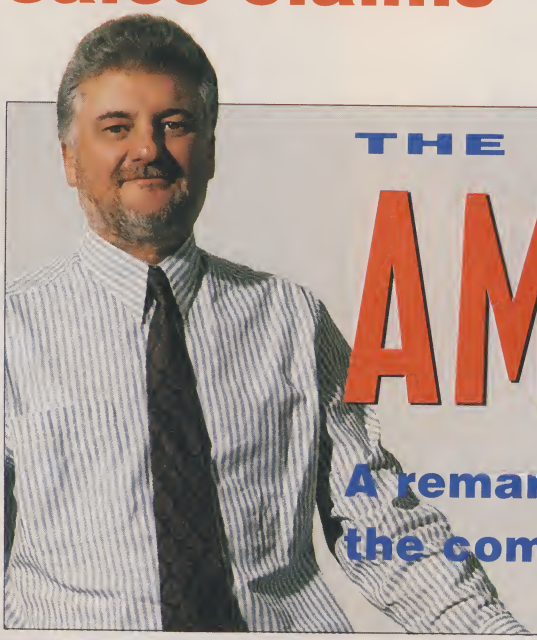

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AMSTRAD

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THE DTP/GRAPHICS TOP 50

32 PAGES PACKED WITH BRITAIN'S BEST COMPUTER BARGAINS

★ SHOPPING EXPRESS ★

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£250,000 damages claim for banned wargames

MICROPROSE SET FOR GERMAN GAMES WAR

Games software publisher MicroProse is suing the West German government for £250,000 for claimed loss of earnings, because three of its games had been banned there.

Up until last summer three combat games – *Silent Service, F15 Strike Eagle* and *Gunship* – were not allowed into Germany. The government's censorship board had ruled that the games were too violent to be sold.

In a widely-publicised appeal, MicroProse managed to make the titles available to German games players. Now the firm, along with its German distributor Rushware, is making a "very serious" claim against the government.

During the period when those games were banned they sold hundreds of thousands of copies around the world. *Gunship* especially is widely considered to be a wargaming classic.

Both MicroProse and Rushware claim they would have sold £250,000 worth of the three games had they been available. – the German computer market is the biggest in Europe.

In Germany, entertainment products which are reported to the government are put under review. The censorship bodies are particularly concerned with anything related to Nazism, the Second World War and violence in general, and are charged with preventing a recurrence of the rise of fascism..

The Germans considered MicroProse's wargames too violent for their market, particularly *Silent Service* which is based around U-Boat battles.

MicroProse's Peter Jones told *Express*: "We feel we have a just case. These games aren't about violence, they are about strategy. We're trailblazing for the whole industry."

• Gunship: *German battle*

• *Portfolio: some advantages*

How to be a better lover with Atari

Pocket computing can make you "richer, a better lover, and a nicer person," according to Atari.

The firm's rather bold Christmas advertising campaign for the Portfolio machine kicked off last week under that claim. This somewhat surprising theory has been put together by a brilliant advertising person who reasons that:

- By being able to do serious computing on the move you'll have more chance of a pay rise.
- By having an electronic diary you'll know when it's 'her birthday' and what her favourite restaurant is.
- You'll be able to write nice letters to people while on the move thus increasing your popularity.

Really nice people will be forking out £250 for the Portfolio this Christmas.

Fired up

One of the best bargains of the year must be a new mini-compilation package from budget games firm Alternative Software.

Amstrad CPC owners are being treated to a collection of all time classics: *Invaders, Galaxians* and *PacMan*. There have been some poor attempts to recreate these games in the recent past but Alternative has done a good job.

Galaxians, for those who don't remember it from their youth, is the variant on *Space Invaders* that saw the aliens occasionally swooping down on you from the marching ranks.

Classic Arcadia: Invaders, Muncher and Axians costs £1.99.

• Axians: *addictive as ever*

A disk by any other name...

• Shakespeare: *updated version*

A series of disks containing the works of playwright William Shakespeare are to be released on the ST and PC.

Everything from well-loved classics such as *Hamlet* and *Henry V* to more obscure works will be available on the public domain. Each disk contains between three and five plays and costs between £5 and £8.

Software house The Complete Publishing Company also plans to launch computer disk versions of works by Wilde, Browning, Byron, Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Chaucer, Milton, Burns, Ibsen, and Chekhov, among others.

Commodore's 200,000 Amiga sales figure disputed by rival

ATARI CLAIMS AMIGA'S FIGURES ARE INFLATED

A fresh dispute has broken out between rivals Atari and Commodore, with the ST's maker alleging that Commodore is "padding" its sales figures for the Amiga.

Atari claims that the latest sales figures for the A500 are "grossly exaggerated". Commodore has responded by questioning Atari's grasp of the market.

The row broke out last week as Commodore publicly celebrated what it claimed was the 200,000th Amiga sale in the UK. Promotional photographs were sent out to the press showing a Surrey couple buying an Amiga and being presented with a free 'Class of the 90s' educational bundle.

Atari has made it clear that it simply does not believe these sales claims. Privately, the firm feels that Commodore is attempting to fudge its figures in order to close the overall sales gap between the ST and the Amiga. Atari estimate that UK sales of the Amiga are around 140,000.

Commodore was quick to respond to its rival. Marketing communications manager Jennifer Perry told *Express*: "Atari obviously hasn't been keeping up with what's happening in the market."

She explained: "All Amigas which come into the country go to our warehousing facility in Peterborough. There they are all quality-control checked and bar coded. That way we know where the machine has come from, where it is going to and how many we have sold. We have now sold 200,000 A500s, and we've doubled in sales every year."

• Commodore's Amiga, source of the dispute. Right: Dean And Olivia Dibstall – proud owners of the 200,000th Amiga

Commodore is calling the Amiga "the UK's most successful 16-bit games computer", and the company says it will reach worldwide sales of two million Amigas some time during 1990.

For its part, Atari claims that it has surpassed its 1989 target of a UK user base of 250,000 and is flying in machines from Taiwan to keep up with demand.

The computer industry has no independent audit body which can monitor the number of machines distributed and validate sales claims. Manufacturers' figures must therefore be taken in good faith – or indeed with a pinch of salt. Sceptics would say that even Commodore and Atari cannot be sure of the precise level of sales because of the computers tied up in distribution. Commodore may, for example, have sold 200,000 A500s to its trade customers without that number of machines having reached the public.

This battle between Atari and Commodore is only the latest episode in a bitter rivalry stretching back years.

Atari's current boss Jack Tramiel set up Commodore more than 30 years ago but resigned in 1984 following a boardroom dispute. He bought the near-dormant Atari from Warner Brothers, then set about designing a 16-bit computer to rival Commodore's then projected Amiga.

In the UK, the Atari ST has always had a larger user base than the Amiga – partly due to a head start in the market and partly because of its lower price point. But this year, for the first time, the major Christmas bundles both cost £399.

The trade's view

Stuart Dinsey, editor of the influential trade newspaper *Computer Trade Weekly*, last week called for the industry to dig deep and pay for independent market research.

He told *Express*: "The industry doesn't have any reliable figures because nobody has been prepared to stand up and pay for it. Gallup has done an admirable job in charting the sales of games software with hardly any financial support.

"And FAST [the Federation Against Software Theft] has to really badger leisure companies in order to get their subscriptions. If the games companies were prepared to pay for research then there are plenty of people willing to do a thorough job."

GRAPHICS STEAM AHEAD

• Locomotion: One of the more impressive entries in the recent Computer Graphics '89 show in London. It was put together by Pacific Data Images from California, and won Best Creative Facility and a special media award.

Dan Dare flies again

Virgin Mastertronic is planning a third version of its hit comic game based on the adventures of Dan Dare.

***Dan Dare III* should be ready by February on most major formats. Virgin Mastertronic says it has been receiving a steady flow of letters since the launch of *Dan Dare II* in 1988 calling for yet another title based on the space daredevil who takes on the Venusian menace to defend the planet.**

"The comic character has been going since the early 1950s and he's really back in vogue again," said software development manager Bryn Gillmore. "We've sold about 250,000 copies of *Dan Dare* games throughout Europe since the first was launched back in 1987."

The first two *Dan Dare* games are still available as budget titles.

• *520STE: here already*

520STE hits UK stores

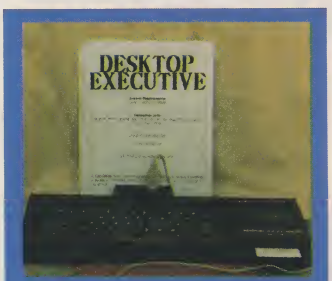
Just three weeks after its launch in Las Vegas, the 520STE has already arrived the UK – buyers are now able to pick up the upgraded machine in selected UK stores.

Atari itself has been extremely quiet about the machine's arrival. "It's just an upgraded version of the ST," offered a spokesman. However, the 520STE wasn't expected until the New Year.

The trade was surprised to see the 1040STE arrive three weeks ago – and that was launched in the summer.

It appears that to keep up with demand Atari has had to ship in the new versions of the ST.

Atari says the main bulk of STs for 1990 will be original versions, so anyone hoping to find an STE over the next few weeks will have to hunt around.■



• Desktop Executive: *windows environment for the Spectrum*

Speccy for WIMPs

The Spectrum Plus 3 might be a nice machine but it's not the easiest to use when it comes to serious applications.

But now there's a neat little program which allows you to take advantage of an easy-to-use WIMP environment. WIMP stands for windows, icons, menus and pointers – it allows you to make commands without having to type them in.

Desktop Executive from Garner Designs costs £16.95 and can be operated by mouse, joystick or keyboard. Call 0582 472067 for more details.■

Computing can become a disease says book

COMPUTER ADDICTS AID NEW RESEARCH

Computers can take over people's lives according to new psychological research published this week, *writes Jerry Glenwright.*

Over 100 computer users participated in the study, the findings of which are published in a book entitled *Computer Addiction?* by Margaret Shotton.

While it has long been accepted that ordinary people can develop addictions to video games, fruit machines and other forms of electronic entertainment, the domestic microcomputer has not featured in the psychologist's top 10 of dangerous playthings.

Programmers spending many months refining fragments of code, hackers burning the midnight oil tapping into distant computers, and games freaks trying to break the magic million have all come under the microscope in the study. Shotton hoped to determine just what it is that makes home computing such an addictive pastime.

She began tests on undergraduates who were experiencing symptoms of addiction to the computers they had access to. Shotton soon decided that she needed to base the study on a wider and more representative cross section of the population, and so advertised for victims of computer addiction. This produced 121 self-confessed 'computer junkies' willing to take part in the study.

• *Computer addict: 'a machine is easier to deal with than people'*

The group were subjected to gruelling personality tests and many candid comments arose which led Shotton to believe that true addiction was being experienced. One addict said: "You get very excited with adventure games. Your adrenalin goes up and you get very tense – you feel that you are all together in a magic land. It's totally engrossing. The mind is focused on one thing and you don't notice anything else."

The belief that computer dependency could lead to a break-up of marriages and to difficulty in sustaining personal relationships was set into sharp relief when one dependent confessed: "A machine is easier to deal with than people. The computer will not leave home if you abuse it."

Shotton concludes in her book that "computers can provide a new and extremely pleasurable means by which people can find personal satisfaction".

The results of her study are published by this week by Taylor and Francis, priced £32 in hardback and £12.95 for the paperback.■

Virus-busters meet to plan strategy

If you have strong views on computer viruses then book a ticket for the first annual CoTRA conference.

The virus-busting outfit will get together on February 21st at London's Press Centre near Fleet Street. The Computer Threat Research Association says the conference will be of interest to those attempting to protect their systems from violent viruses and for those who have been attracted to the subject.

CoTRA was set up last April and plans to stop the increasing spread of viruses. The fee is a hefty £225, but there will be a large number of speakers lined up.

Call 01-236 4080 to book.■

Green computer to save environment

A computer program is being developed by Newcastle University which could prevent harm to the environment.

The 'land use strategy program' will be able to simulate the effects on agricultural areas of urban developments.

For example, if a housing estate were built, the PC program would be able to predict effects on surrounding areas.

The system uses geographical information from specific areas as well as more detailed data on animal populations. It's being funded by the National Environment Research and the Economic and Social Research Councils. The first project will be specific areas of the River Ouse.■

• *Emlyn Hughes and friends : riding to success?*

Emlyn kicks off again

The long-awaited ST and Amiga versions of Audiogenic's *Emlyn Hughes' International Soccer* are to be launched next month.

The game, which was heralded as the best football title ever for the 8-bit machines, has been under development all year. A PC version is also under consideration.

***Emlyn Hughes* uses *Matchday*-like gameplay as well as detailed tactical aspects. It was in the Gallup charts for 45 weeks.**

Also around the corner is *Emlyn Hughes' Arcade Quiz*. This isn't a football quiz game or even a sports quiz. It covers pop, entertainment and the arts. That will be out on all major formats at the end of January.■

• Ghostbusters II: *review problems*

ACE played on GB2

The influential computer entertainment magazine *ACE* was on sale last week despite problems with a leading software house concerning a games review.

Activision had been talking to its lawyers about *ACE*'s review of its Christmas game *Ghostbusters II* (*Express* 57). An *ACE* reviewer gave the game the equivalent of 25 per cent – much of the computer press has given it fair to middling reviews.

Neither Activision nor the magazine's publisher EMAP are willing to discuss the matter. It had been feared that an injunction would be slapped on the magazine, preventing distribution and costing EMAP many thousands of pounds.

EMAP has said that it will stick by the opinions of all its reviewers. However, the firm is refusing to reveal the identity of the *Ghostbusters II* reviewer. The article was credited to a pseudonym.■

Touched up

Many people come into contact with computers every day of their lives, but very few manage to become sufficiently familiar with the computer's main method of input – the QWERTY keyboard, *writes Jerry Glenwright.*

***Touch-Typing* is a a new PC program that offers users a whole host of features to coach the novice and two finger typist to an acceptable standard.**

Consisting of 10 lessons, each divided into between 10 and 20 exercises, *Touch-Typing* provides over 20,000 keypresses to ensure that students reach the desired level of typing skill.

Featuring many innovations such as a skill level recorder which can be consulted after completing each lesson, typing speedometer, extensive statistics detailing the exact areas which need attention and a built-in quality of progress checker that prevents students from progressing too quickly, *Touch-Typing* is probably the most comprehensive typing tutor on the market at the moment.

It costs £24.95 for all PC compatibles and is available from Scandinavian PC Systems. You can give them a call on 0926 314334.■

Decade ends with huge manufacturing job cuts

TOUGH TIMES FOR COMPUTER WORKERS

The decade is ending on a sour note for those working in the computer industry, with massive job losses being announced by some of the major players.

IBM, the world's largest computer manufacturer, last week laid off 10,000 workers – some five per cent of its workforce. The company has not made staff cuts in the past 40 years. Cuts will not be enforced through compulsory redundancies but by natural wastage – a freeze on new recruitment and encouraging early retirements.

This is bad news for those hoping to break into the computer industry – one which is difficult to succeed in at the best of times.

Much of the problem stems from a recession in the United States. IBM says business in Europe and Asia is still growing but all-round cuts have to be made in order to compensate. The firm's mainframe business has slowed down considerably worldwide.

Companies such as Wang, Apricot, ICL, Data Logic, Nixdorf, Norsk Data and McDonnell Douglas have all been forced to make job cuts in recent months. All these are major employers.

"There are just too many computer companies around," said computer market analyst Judy Stewart of City firm Kleinworth Benson. "About 90 per cent of manufacturers can expect trouble going into the 1990s."

Other analysts agree. Stockbroker Warburg Securities last week told *Computer Talk* magazine: "Demand is relatively weak across the economy. It's a fair bet that growth in the computer industry is going to be slow."

While the industry on the whole is being squeezed, the home and low-cost market is the only one to continue growing. However, that area is not as labour intensive, and therefore expensive to run, as the high-end manufacturing sector.■

AFTER A FASHION

It's the latest fashion for an emerging sub-culture in California. Cyberpunks are dressing up in bits of computers and calling it 'micro-chic'.

These strange people model themselves on alternative hero hackers culled from the imagination of writers such as William Gibson. In his book Neuromancer *the cyberpunks are the scurge of official and governmental computer networks.*

Today's cyberpunks continually talk about 'jacking in' and 'alternative realities' and are a bit wacky all round. If you can relate to the fashion but don't fancy yourself in this stunning microchip number, there are plenty of silicon chip badges to choose from..■

Mac show up

Macintosh users feeling in the minority in a PC dominated world can take heart from recent attendance at the *Mac User* show.

The four-day event at the beginning of November attracted 15,903 visitors with some 1,700 people visiting the show twice. The attendance is more than 25 per cent up on last year.

An independent audit revealed a large potential user base. Six in ten of those visitors without a machine said they intended to buy one within 12 months.

• Mac User *show: more interest*

Sage moves up a gear

Sage, one of Britain's leading business software houses, has announced that a new line-up of low-cost networking programs will be launched in the spring.

The new programs will be made available along with the recently-launched *Sterling* range of accounting packages and older *BusinessWise* word processing software.

Sage says, however, that no new products will be launched for the Atari ST. The firm had hoped that ST users would be attracted to business-orientated products, but its managing director, David Goldman, now says that there's little demand for that machine.

Meanwhile, the firm moved up into the big league last week with the announcement of a massive £21 million flotation on the stock exchange.

Sage's directors will be looking to reap the rewards of five years at the top of the UK's business software industry and they will be keeping an eye open for acquisitions of other companies.

"Some of us are looking to cash in a few of our chips," Goldman told *Express*. "And as the oldest of the lot, I'm 52, I'll be cashing in a few more than the rest – just as insurance."■

Cat talk

A German–English computer-assisted translation system has been launched for the PC.

German CATS (Computer-Assisted Transalation System) is a massive program which publisher Abacus claims can translate any script no matter how complicated it is. It costs a hefty $2,500. ■

Processor, heal thyself – new chip can cure own faults

A new 'self-healing' computer chip is about to be launched which is set to take the semi-conductor industry by storm, *writes Jerry Glenwright.*

Designed and marketed by Pilkington, Britain's leading glass manufacturer, the chip has already received much interest, notably from UK electronics giant Plessey.

The new integrated circuit – called the Dynamically Programmable Logic Device (DPLD) has a remarkable 10,000 individual circuits etched into its surface. But the feature which makes the DPLD unique is that those circuits can be programmed to re-establish contact with others on the chip should the links be broken by a fault.

Previously, if an integrated circuit developed a fault the entire chip became unusable, even though the majority of its circuits might be fully functioning, because no method of re-configuring the healthy circuits existed.

The DPLD overcomes this problem by enabling re-programming of its circuits at any stage. If part of the chip develops a fault, the good circuits can bypass damaged neighbours.

So many applications exist for a self-healing chip such as remote space craft, nuclear power plants and other inaccessible installations, that DPLD's designer, Kenneth Austin, believes it will become an international standard for semi-conductor design.

Sir Clive Sinclair's wafer scale RAM chip has been under development for some years. That is designed to bypass faulty sections of a chip in the manufacturing stage.

Power up your Amiga

For Amiga owners in search of true power processing, but who can't wait for the arrival of Commodore's rumoured Amiga 3000, Advanced Technology Holdings has announced the release of a low cost 68030 turbo card, *writes Jason Holborn.*

The Mega Midget Racer is an accelerator card for the Amiga A500 and 2000 – and it's the first and only 68030 accelerator to employ state-of-the-art surface mount technology.

The board features selectable clock speeds of 20, 25 and 33MHz, and can also take advantage of floating point maths co-processors to run at an impressive 40MHz. The asynchronous design of the Mega Midget provides blistering operating speeds through the use of an easily-changeable crystal oscillator device which sets the speed.

The addition of either a 68881 or the faster 68882 maths co-processor makes the board ideal for heavy number crunching applications such as CAD, 3D animation and ray tracing.

To keep costs down, the board is available with the less costly 20MHz 030 chip, although users can easily upgrade to the optimum specification. With the addition of optional 512K 32-bit RAM module, the Amiga ROM kernel can be copied into RAM to provide lightning-fast screen updates, page flipping and rapid scrolling.

The board also provides a true 32-bit bus which allows the addition of high speed I/O devices such as optical drives, fast hard drives etc.

The base Mega Midget Racer costs £649.95 and is available from Advanced Technology Holdings. Contact the firm on 0923 817549.

Flicking footie

Yet another football game is set to be launched, but this one isn't even based on the real game.

It's *Subbuteo*, the computer version of the classic table top game and it should be arriving in the spring.

Publisher Goliath is already responsible for the highly acclaimed international football strategy game Tracksuit Manager.

The firm tied up a deal with games company Waddingtons which has been selling Subbuteo for the past 27 years. Goliath's boss Doug Matthews says the original game's popular appeal will be retained in the computer-based version.

Restrictive regulations stop Eastern bloc exports

COMPUTER FIRMS LOSE OUT IN EAST

As the Berlin wall is demolished, a massive new computer market is ready to open up for Western manufacturers – but they may be missing the opportunity due to over-restrictive laws, *writes Gary Chambers.*

The shift to Western economic standards in the Warsaw Pact nations is forcing a review of our security export controls. These currently prevent the shipment of certain technologies into communist countries.

However, many Eastern bloc importers say they have no trouble in buying Western computers which are not officially allowed across borders.

Those controls are contained in an international agreement which details approved technical specifications, but the practicality of that is now in doubt. Polish and Hungarian sources have revealed to *Express* that they can buy almost any computer they desire from American-supplied sources in Indochina – and at 'very competitive' prices.

Meanwhile, British and continental manufacturers are hindered by outdated regulations, largely at the recommendation of the United States.

Nick Mitchell, a spokesman for the Department of Trade and Industry commented: "It is likely that if [political] changes continue, and if they get democratic governments, then a more lenient view will be taken."

However, he warned that Western security chiefs will not allow changes in technical export laws unless they see "stable democratic governments". The British government has already said that it will take a 15-year period of democracy before it can be sure of stability.

An extraordinary black market has already opened up in the Eastern bloc and suppliers are finding it difficult to compete. Despite the low value of Eastern currencies computers are being bought in from Taiwan and Singapore.

One Polish official told *Express* that it is "no problem to get hold of your computers". Another in Budapest said British firms are "far too late" in offering STs, Amigas and Amstrad machines which can all be bought from the Far East.

Lajos Gait, managing director of Anglo-Hungarian import/export firm VT, commented: "Where the agreement is concerned there are few countries that give a damn about it. We've never had any problems getting computers from Taiwan or Singapore."

An official spokesman at the American embassy in London said he could not deny that "such things happen".

However, the laws are being relaxed. Last autumn it was decided that British companies could sell 16-bit micros to the Eastern bloc without a licence. Nevertheless, a massive market is now opening up for 32-bit machines.

What's allowed

Machines with these specs are now allowed into communist states:

- **16-bit micros.**
- **Up to 4Mb of RAM**
- **Less than 100Mb hard disk**
- **Data transfer less than 10.3 megabits per second**
- **Up to 1024x1024 pixels graphics display in 64 colours or up to 320x320 pixels in 256 colours**

MIDI marvel bargain

Ladbroke Computing has announced a price cut of 50 per cent on its *MIDI Studio* sequencer for the Atari ST.

The program is a fully-featured MIDI sequencing package that received rave reviews when it was released at its original £100 price level. The program is now being sold for the delightfully low price of £49.95, which must make it one of the most impressive Atari MIDI packages in terms of features per pound.

If your ST is in need of extra memory Ladbroke can also help you out. The firm is offering 512K, 2Mb and 4Mb upgrade boards for use with all STs. Call Ladbroke on 0772 203166.

Tetris 'copy' blocked

***Tetris*, the addictive building-block game, is at the centre of a new 'look and feel' storm.**

The game was sourced from the Soviet Union but is being sold in the US by Spectrum Holobyte. That firm last week managed to stop Accolade from selling a similar game called *Fits and Pieces (2D)*.

Accolade had decided to pull *Fits and Pieces* – which also works by dropping different shaped blocks into the correct spaces – without going into a court room.

***Tetris* was recently the subject of a legal struggle between Nintendo and Atari Games (*Express passim*). When first launched it was hailed as one of the best games of the decade because of its simplicity, originality and addictive qualities.**

Hands-on review by Susan Maxwell of the new portable ST

STACY'S UK ARRIVAL IS MUSIC TO YOUR EARS

The Stacy, Atari's new laptop portable, is finally available in the UK. The two models, Stacy 2 and Stacy 4, are in the shops now, and they boast impressive specifications, especially for music lovers.

Stacy 2, which comes with a 20Mb hard drive, 2Mb of RAM and a 720K floppy, costs £1,299. The more powerful Stacy 4 has the same single floppy but includes a 40Mb hard drive and 4Mb of RAM. It costs £1,799.

These prices make it certain that the Stacy is going to attract a lot of attention as Atari has packed, in the size of a briefcase, the punch of a hard-disk Mega ST.

I managed to get hold of a Stacy 4 two months ago and during that time I've used plenty of standard ST software. The results? Everything – games programs, comms packages, utilities, compilers and sequencers – worked without a hitch.

TROUBLE-FREE

Old favourites like Laser C and Steinberg's *Pro 24* right up to some of the new sequencer software like Hollis Research's *Trackman II* and *MIDIman* behaved as they should – so it doesn't look as though there's going to be much in the way of compatibility problems.

This means of course that the Stacy is going to offer a trouble-free portable doorway into the vast amount of ST software which has been written over the last few years.

What's it like to use? To have 4Mb of memory and a hard disk on any machine is great. To have that sort of power on a portable is brilliant. As an example I've been playing live with a band using a Stacy running programs like Dr. T's *KCS* sequencer. With the Stacy we were able to have sequencers running and have massive RAM disks for MIDI song arrangements and system data.

Accessing the hard disk is much faster than floppy anyway, but once 4Mb of RAM becomes available, you begin to realize just how useful that amount of memory can be.

What about the Stacy's disadvantages? The numeric keypad is too small and the trackball, which definitely takes more getting used to than the average mouse does, is a pain most of the time. I opted for plugging in a mouse instead but, on the odd occasion when you're short of space, it does serve a useful purpose.

Even though the Stacy models are well priced, it will be hard for them to make much headway in the business sector. People don't buy computers here, they buy PC and MS-DOS compatibility. Nevertheless the power packed into a Stacy 2 is going to be tempting – a full hard disk system with 2Mb of memory at a price little more than you'd pay for just a 2Mb memory upgrade on some computers.

MIDI MUSICIANS

The question that people are now beginning to ask is how will the Stacy range appeal to the MIDI musicians who have made such an impact on the ST sales of recent years? In the world of music many are saying that the Stacy has little to beat it.

The alternatives, like Yamaha's C1, or Apple's Mac, are just too expensive to even consider for most users.

It's very early days, but all the signs indicate that Atari has got its sums right with this new machine.■

• *Stacy: making the right notes*

• *Next move: Speelman plays by computer*

Grandmaster goes on line

Chess international grandmaster Jonathan Speelman has been trying out computer chess using comms.

Speelman was pitted against five opponents from around the country in simultaneous games. The opponents were all drawn from Prestel's ChessBox Club membership and included a group of schoolchildren and a severely-disabled player.

Individual moves were sent and received using Prestel's Mailbox electronic messaging facility. Once recorded the moves were displayed on chessboard screens. The players could watch how each game was progressing in real time.

"Playing chess by computer was an unusual experience for me – not being able to see the opponents certainly added to the fun," said Speelman. "When I discovered the one of my opponents suffered from cerebral palsy it really brought home to me how ChessBox can help the disabled."

After four hours of play Speelman won four games and drew the other. Prestel is on 0442 237237.■

King of the castle

Innovative arcade adventure publisher Incentive is to launch a new game next April called *Castle Master*.

It's being touted as the first action-adventure to use 3D solid polygons. Incentive – run by programmer Ian Andrew – has already published well received games such as *Driller*, *Dark Side* and *Total Eclipse*.

Set in 16th century England, *Castle Master* gives you the chance to explore a castle and get rid of the baddies that lurk within its dungeons and halls.

In a new deal, Incentive is to be published by Domark. The firm had previously been under the MicroProse umbrella.

Domark's Mark Strachan commented: "It's brilliant news. I've always respected Ian's innovation in producing original product and I'm delighted to join forces with his company. Just wait and see the results."

Castle Master will be released on all major formats.■

•Total Eclipse: *now another 3D adventure*

COMMENT

It's time for unbiased industry research on the levels of hardware penetration; the enigma of computer addiction; simulated simulations!

With this week's cries of 'Oh yes I have,' countered by 'Oh no you haven't', and punctuated by the odd 'Look out, he's coming up behind you', it is tempting to think that the January pantomime season has arrived prematurely this winter.

In fact, though, these frolics are bang on schedule for a pre-Christmas bunfight from those arch-rivals Atari and Commodore – this time about who has sold how many machines. For those in the computer trade the sight of these two squabbling is not a new one – they are usually to be found attempting to outdo or undermine each another in one area of business or another.

When even the NATO–Warsaw Pact cold war seems to be thawing irrevocably, Atari and Commodore continue to glare icicles at one another. While it might be pompous of *Express* to pontificate at length on the 'unseemliness' of their latest 'tis, 'tis, 'tis/'tisn't, 'tisn't, 'tisn't exchange (is this the five-minute argument or the full half-hour?), it is true to say that jaws dropped in this office as the story broke.

Buyers of those excellent micros the ST and Amiga are wise enough to take an interest in the fates of their machines and the companies involved – the success of Atari and Commodore is an important factor in the future of your computer.

That all equates to an increasing range of services, products and advantages for the ST and Amiga. Even owners of 8-bit micros must take an interest in the sphere of computing into which they contemplate moving.

The ST and the Amiga run neck-and-neck as the most desirable low-cost home computers available in Europe. There are a whole host of differences between the machines (as any owner of either will all too eagerly point out) but, essentially, they are similar articles.

While it is clear that both are having a good time of it, it's not so clear how good. We have to take any manufacturer's sales claims in good faith, although bearing in mind that they are the figures of an extremely interested party.

Commodore says it has sold 200,000 A500s in the UK. Atari says that figure is closer to 140,000. Neither of these companies is interested in funding unbiased research into the true state of affairs, and frankly who can blame them? Each knows, to a reasonable degree of accuracy, how many machines it is selling, and each thinks it knows the extent of its rival's successes.

But how nice it would be to have the definitive figures. Just how many STs and Amigas are there in British homes? For most of us it would satisfy little more than idle curiosity, admittedly, but for software manufacturers the size of user bases and the direction in which trade is moving are of vital interest, and essential information if they are to maximise their profitability.

Of all the pursuits available to ST and Amiga owners, gaming comes out on top. Games software publishers are currently making fortunes from the 16-bit boom. As the people for whom hard figures mean the most, it is they who must surely find the necessary funding for a proper statistical analysis of the market.

The software houses have a new industry body which, we are told, has been set up to promote the industry as a whole, to safeguard the software publishers, and to give the consumers a good deal. It is called the European Leisure Software Publishers Association.

Let us hope that we will see ELSPA doing something in the near future other than sponsoring a few anti-piracy ads and congregating for jolly beanos in far-flung places.

If the publishers were to stick their hands in their pockets and throw the coins into the middle, they could easily fund an independent body to monitor just how the immediate future of home computing is shaping up, and they could then act on those figures with some degree of confidence. The successful and efficient development of the market is plainly to everyone's advantage.

In the meantime, though, we are lumbered with Prince Charming and the Demon King scrapping it out amid thunderflashes and theatrical smoke, and we don't even know who is playing which role....

Margaret Shotton's new book, titled *Computer Dependency?*, reveals some fascinating insights into the world of the so-called computer junkie.

This phenomenon of the late 1980s is simple enough to categorise, according to Shotton – almost all affected are young, male, intelligent, middle class, shy people who enjoy their own company and steer clear of athletic pursuits. Many have academic parents who Shotton describes as "undemonstrative and unaffectionate".

The 'victims' often feel that they gain parental approval for achievements of tasks or deeds instead of being "loved for just being themselves".

It's also fascinating that almost all had previous hobbies before they turned to computing – hobbies which they also followed with enthusiasm and vigour bordering on obsession.

Most have been avid readers of science fiction, or of technical books based on their chosen hobby. Computing is almost always an extension of a previous hobby based on science or technology.

The 'junkies' spend all their spare time with the computer, and always alone. They have few friends, and it's extremely rare to find them with a girlfriend.

There is no 'pay-off' here – no punchline or easy moral lesson to be repeated. But it is intriguing to learn something of the make-up of people who not only regard computing as a hobby, or even as a way of life, but virtually as a reason for living.

How extraordinary that a computer game version of Subbuteo is now on the way.

Soccer simulations are great fun, and there are plenty to choose from. But now we are offered a simulation of a simulation of a football game.

Subbuteo is supposed to aspire to recreating football's magic. Will Goliath's forthcoming game seek to achieve the same thing, we wonder, or will it aspire to recreating Subbuteo's magic? Or both? The mind boggles.

When the licence hunter finally runs out of famous things to bag, where will he turn next? To releasing computer game versions of other computer games, perhaps? Or are we in danger of touching on a sore subject?

Have you got any comments on Comment? We welcome letters on any of the issues raised. Send them to:

Express *Mail, 4 Queen Street, Bath, Avon BA1 1EJ*

ONE YEAR AGO THIS WEEK

17 December 1988

Manufacturers and dealers were predicting the best Christmas since 1983, and the Dixons chain had already sold out of the Spectrum Plus 2. With Amstrad unable to organise further Plus 2 supplies (Dixons alone had an order in for 50,000), sales were said to be mushrooming on the disk-based Plus 3.

Commodore admitted to finding it "disconcerting" that a machine as old as the C64 was selling so heavily (distributor ZCL said it was shifting 700 per day to dealers), and sales of Amigas were reported to have 'hit the roof'.

Amstrad's Alan Sugar, who left school at 17, received an honorary Doctor of Science degree from London's City University. In 1987 Sugar gave a series of business lectures at the university, advising would-be entrepreneurs to avoid journalists and Americans.

The Federation Against Software Theft successfully prosecuted a Bath businessman in Bristol Crown Court for illegally installing pirate software onto computer hard disks as an incentive to prospective hardware buyers.

A House of Lords select committee rejected the idea of legislation governing the use of computers and VDUs in the workplace, arguing that evidence of eye and muscular injuries was inconclusive. Meanwhile, predominantly office workers union MSF revealed that 70 members were claiming compensation from employers and the DHSS over incidences of repetitive strain injury.

SHOOT FROM THE LIP

■ **"If I were Amstrad I don't think I'd want to associate my product with an endangered species like a cheetah." Newstar's William Poel on his ex-employer's latest ad campaign.**

■ **"While the Industrial Revolution drove people out if the countryside and into the cities, 1990s technology could have the reverse effect." Leslie Tilley in *The Times* on 'telecottages'**

■ **"The will to use computers in such a dedicated fashion affects about one in 300 computer owners." Margerate Shotton, author of *Computer Addiction?***

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BARGAIN

A friend of mine who's new to this computing lark picked up a 1040 at the recent Computer Shopper Show. The price? Not £399, not even £350: in fact, he paid under £330. Makes you think.

On the other hand, there's probably never been a worse time to buy an ST. Why? Well, the trade press has it on the word of honour of an Atari spokesman (yes, yes, alright, simmer down) that the 1040STE is being delivered to stores around the country as you read this.

Now while the upgraded 1040 has hardly been greeted with open arms – open derision might be nearer the mark – there seems little point in rushing out to buy when you could well pick up the enhanced version for the same dosh in a few weeks time. So tell your mates currently saving up/working on the nearest and dearest: hang on!

ST DTP GATHERS STEAM

The ever-expanding desktop publishing software base for the ST appears to know no bounds. At the professional end of the market both Signa's mighty £400 *Calamus* and Mirrorsoft's £200 *Fleet Street Publisher* have recently undergone major upgrades, while at the budget end zzSoft's £20 *EZText Plus* is continuing to do very nicely, thank you (a slightly cut-down PD version, *EZText*, appears on the ever-delicious *ST Format* Cover Disk due on the streets on December 21st: don't miss out!).

And from the States comes news of several interesting developments. There's a $25 budget program rather off-puttingly called *Kidpublisher Professional* the substance of which sounds well worth investigating, and a new, mid-range word processor-cum-DTP package called *Word Flair* is about to be launched. No details yet on when these will appear in Blighty, but investigations are currently underway.

ST'S NEW NLQ FONT PRINTER

The ST Club has just announced *Fontprint*, a memory resident program which emulates the downloading facilities of Epson-compatible printers and allows NLQ downloadable fonts to be used with any Epson-compatible, including printers which can't normally download them.

Fontprint uses NLQ Star or Juki fonts and enables fonts containing up to 224 characters to be downloaded. It's compatible with most of the more conventional text-based word processors – including *First Word*, and can be used with *Fontswitch* or other downloading software. The 24-pin printer version is also accompanied by *Italicprint*, which prints true italic fonts in conjunction with downloaded non-italic fonts.

Fontprint costs £5.95: order from ST Club, 9 Sutton Place, 49 Stoney St, Nottingham NG1 1LX. Or, if you prefer, telephone 0602 4120241. Tell 'em *Express* sent you.

ATARIS EVERYWHERE

It's getting so you can't open a magazine without finding the familiar shape of the Atari staring out at you. Sophisticated man about town Andrew Lambirth of Peckham (no doubt the Dulwich end: doesn't anyone live at the *other* end of Peckham?) has found the Atari Portfolio secreted in the pages of both *Time Out* and *The Face*, while John Burgess of Northampton points out that *TV Times* appears to have an unlimited stock of STs on offer to winners of its crossword.

And it doesn't stop there, goodness me no. Young, fun-loving, hip cool popsters will soon discover the ST nestling between the Kylies and the Jasons on the frantically busy pages of *Smash Hits*. Next week Atari has £20,000 worth of Powerpacks to give away in the December 13th issue.

What's promising about this, Atari itself has stated, is that some 60 per cent of the *Smash Hits* readership is girls, traditionally the twilight zone for home computers. If the readers can be distracted for five minutes from 'What Brother Beyond's Nigel Does In The Bath' we might begin to see an end to the notion that 'girls aren't interested in computers'.

OCEAN WAVES, NOT DROWNS

According to a run-up-to-Christmas poll, titles from the Manchester-based software house Ocean have a 30 per cent market share in the combined 8-bit/16-bit software sales market.

A more significant indicator of which way the games market tide is flowing, perhaps, is the fact that, though Mirrorsoft software sales have just a little over three per cent of market share, its share of the market earnings came in at second place.

Conclusion: Mirrorsoft may not be shifting software by the million like Ocean, but concentration on the more lucrative 16-bit market is paying off.

VIRGIN'S MAGNETISM

Adventurers nationwide stayed up really late and danced in the streets, crying 'Three cheers for Virgin Mastertronic's signing of a long term licensing agreement with adventure and role-playing supremos Magnetic Scrolls!' this week.

The news is bound to excite lovers of *The Pawn* and its ilk, and does indeed bode well for the future of the genre. Anita Sinclair's company, now nearly six years old, has been considering for some time how best to proceed. Apparently the most important reason for choosing Virgin Mastertronic was because 'they are nice people to do business with'.

First fruits of this new marriage, if marriages can be said to produce fruit, will be the release on the ST next Spring of something Mag Scrolls has been working on for the past couple of years. More details, adventurers, as we get them.

ADVENTURE AID

I've just received the first copy of *Harlequin & Steel*, the magazine of Inter-Action, a recently established adventurers' club. Founded by Nik Wild, it's looking promising. Difficult as it is to gauge reaction in your first issue, *Harlequin & Steel* (what on earth does that refer to?) packs in plenty of tips, reviews and news. Get more info from Inter-Action, The Cottage, Ashford Carbonell, Ludlow, Shropshire.

Steve Carey

PLAYING TIP

GET THROUGH XENON II

Here are some tips for getting through level 2 of *Xenon II*– we're assuming you've already got through level one.

In the middle of level two, the guardian is killed by flying up one side and shooting his eye. Now rush to the top corner and then go over to the other top corner. Now shoot down the second eye. The screen will scroll back and you can shoot the last eye.

At the shop, buy health. At the end of the level, fly up one side of the spider until it moves down the screen then fly backwards quickly and zig zag across in front of it, killing it.

At the shop, sell side shot and buy laser, power up and health.

Tip from Richard Scott from Surrey.

• Xenon II, *ultimate blast-'em-up*

GHOSTBUSTERS II

Activision • £19.99

With all the hype just beginning to surround the release of *Ghostbusters II*, Activision's film licence is certain to race to the top of the charts. But is the licence any good?

The game sees you exploring three levels taken from the film. You must advance through each level in turn, consistently battling against green ghouls. Level one places you in a ventilation shaft, mindlessly blasting the monsters which came out of the wall. In level two, you're inside the Statue of Liberty once again blasting at ghosts, but this time using a flame thrower. In level three you're through to the museum and here you meet, yep, you guessed it, more ghosts, screaming for laser bolts.

The graphics are very impressive but the gameplay is tedious and boring after a very short time. The moment you see the opening screen, you know exactly what's going to be along next – and you're never surprised. Another sad case of great graphics, but where's the gameplay, guys?

• *Blasting with lady liberty*

GRAPHIX ENHANCEMENTS

A letter has reached me from distant Dumfermline and the pen of Graham Paterson, who has set up a graphics catalogue (or, as he puts it, a 'Graphix' Catalogue) of public domain clip art, all in an IMG format.

Graham is not presenting new material, but as he says, "the problem now is that ordering such disks presents you with the question, 'Do I have this clip art already?'"

And do you know, I believe that in a real sense Graham is right. On the other hand, there is no doubt that clip art can help brighten up a newsletter, poster or magazine that you're creating on your ST – though you may find little use for the picture of Sam Fox wearing boxing gloves (I kid you not) on disk nine.

• *The Graphix catalogue*

The catalogue, which currently stands at 11 double-sided disks, with two more soon to follow, costs £2 and can be obtained from: Graham Paterson, 10 Lilac Grove, Pitcorthie, Dunfermline, Fife KY11 5AR.

PUBLISHING REVOLUTION

Amiga DTP programs have never been particularly up to scratch when compared to similar programs on the Mac and PC compatibles. Even *Professional Page*, Amiga's best DTP package to date, suffers from some glaring oversights and ommisions.

However, this scarcity of good DTP for the Amiga could change faster than the wink of an eye with the release of *Saxon Publisher* from little known Canadian company, Saxon Industries of Ontario.

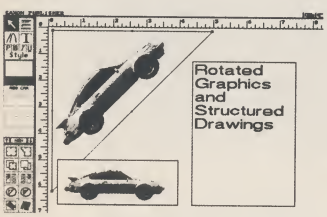
Saxon Publisher, an exceptionally powerful desktop publishing system, is designed for use on Amigas with 1Mb or more. Further, the program includes many extras never before mentioned in polite conversation about the merits of Amiga DTP systems.

Technically speaking, *Saxon Publisher* supports bitmapped textures on text and structured drawings, full facilities for manipulating structured graphics as well as EPS support.

The program also allows you to create non-rectangular text and graphic boxes, drop caps, text point sizes up to 8,000 points (that is, characters nine feet, three inches high!), vertical justification and powerful facilities for the manipulation of bitmapped graphics.

Saxon Publisher also boasts an artificially intelligent routine to double or even quadruple the resolution of bitmaps without destroying the sharpness of the detail.

And as you would expect from a professional Amiga DTP package, *Saxon Publisher* provides support facility for four colour separation with full trapping and undercolour removal.



• Saxon Publisher *in action*

When this program will be available in this country has yet to be determined, but what is certain is that it isn't going to be cheap – expect a price of at least £400! For those of you who cannot wait, contact Saxon on 010-1-613 226 2355.

PLAYING TIP

AXEL'S MAGIC HAMMER

Starting from F10, press all the function keys in turn (right down to F1). You can now select which level you wish to play on by simply pressing the number on the keyboard while the game is playing.

Tip from Andy Nuttall, Liverpool

BARS AND PIPES

If you thought *Music-X* was the ultimate sequencer system, then you're in for a big surprise with the release of *Bars&Pipes* from Blue Ribbon Software of Atlanta, in the good old US of A.

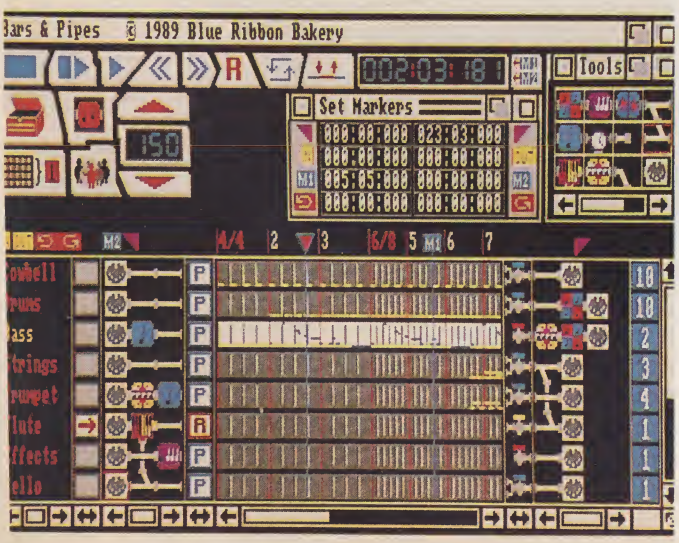
Bars&Pipes, an object-orientated music composition system, guides your musical inspirations from conception to final performance (isn't that what they all say?). Indeed, *Bars&Pipes* is built up of four distinct elements – PipeLine, Toolbox, Sequencer and Editor.

By arranging on-screen pipe and valve graphics, you can direct the flow of MIDI information on a track-by-track basis. The toolbox module supports multiple keyboard splits, event filtering, randomiser, chord substitution, inverting, phrase shaping, harmonising and other useful tools.

Bars&Pipes puts no restriction on the number of available tracks to which you can record. And at your fingertips *Bars & Pipes* places impressive recording features, including: global cut, copy and paste, auto allocation, punch in and out, loop recording (very useful), global graphical display of music on all tracks, tempo maps, external time code sync, rhythm, chord, key and lyric input and many others.

Sequences can be edited either as a piano-roll-like display (*à la Music-X*) or as bars on a staff. By opening mutliple edit windows at the same time, you can freely cut and paste between windows. What is more, the inclusion of a key, chord and rhythm change facility allows for algorithmic composition.

For more info on this wondrous piece of music software, double your phone bill in an instant by phoning Blue Ribbon on 010-1-404 377 1514.



• *Powerful* Bars&Pipes *looks nice too*

SNIPPETS....

A-Max users will be pleased to know that the company hopes to have a hard drive compatible version of the Mac emulator available early next year. Although *A-Max* has proved itself an alternative to a full blown Mac, until now the lack of hard drive support has been crippling the prospect of direct comparison.

Gold Disk has finally released the follow up to its successful structured drawing package, *Professional Draw*. *ProDraw 2* supports oversized bitmaps, AGFA/Compugraphic font support (35 fonts are included as standard), text wrapping, full dot-matrix printing, colour range blending (a little like the 'Smooth' option in *Deluxe Paint*), four times faster operation and others.

Abacus has released another book for Amiga owners, *Desktop Video Guide*. The book, aimed at the Amiga owner considering a move into the complicated world of desktop video, explains genlocking, digitising, frame grabbing and how to set up a desktop video studio.

BACK TO YOUR ROOTS

MicroMaster Software in the States has released *Your Family Tree*, the first genealogy program for the Amiga.

The program enables the sturdy historian to build a database of information consisting of up to 16 million individuals, 16 million family groups, maximum of eight spouses per individual, 40 children per family and more. The program requires 1Mb and is available from MicroMaster on 010-1-412 775 3000.

MOUSEY BUSINESS

While the Naksha mouse compares very well where price is concerned (£45.94), the specification is a cut above the rest.

Indeed, the first thing you'll notice about Naksha's mouse is the smoothness of operation. Not only does the mouse glide comfortably across the desktop, but you feel as if you have greater control over the on-screen pointer as well.

Quite frankly, before trying the Naksha mouse, I was happy to carry on using my Commodore mouse instead of any one of the vast number of alternatives positively squeaking for my attention. What better recommendation than that? Contact the helpful and incredibly busy people at Naksha on 0925 56398.

Jason Holborn

GHOULS 'N' GHOSTS

US Gold • £24.99

• Ghouls 'n' Ghosts: *first rate, addictive*

A few years ago Elite released an extremely successful arcade conversion called *Ghost 'n' Goblins*. Now that US Gold has secured the rights to the follow up, *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts*, fans of bold Sir Arthur can look forward to carrying on the quest at home.

The question is, did US Gold convert *Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* to the humble home computer successfully? The answer is a resounding YES!

***Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* follows a similar format to its predecessor, being a scrolling shoot-'em-up-cum-platform-game, but with a few delectable additions and changes, such as a whole range of even more devious obstacles and creatures and a host of new weapons with which the plucky knight can do battle.**

***Ghouls 'n' Ghosts* is first rate, with sound being of the best I've heard for some time, with loads of incredibly atmospheric music to back the superbly drawn and animated graphics, which wouldn't look out of place in an arcade.**

Enough of the game's superficial niceties, how does it play? Well you can all stop holding your breath – it's excellent. The feel of the control is right, with the difficulty level just right, so that you keep playing to get that little bit further.

The continue play option stops you from getting bored, since you don't have to start from the beginning of the game every time: A point which comes in useful I might add, especially when that end of level guardian gets you for the fourth time running!

The asking price of 25 quid may seem a little steep to begin with, but it's not often you see a game packed with such sheer addictive quality as this. In fact I haven't had so much fun since *Stunt Car Racer* (recommendation indeed!).

BELOW THE SURFACE MOUNT

Recently I had occasion to try and get a circuit board upgraded with extra memory chips. As the chips were surface mounted devices, with the legs bent under straight onto the solder pads, I had to ring around to find someone who would do it for me. After much searching, I found a volunteer: Martin Creswick at Datamation Services in Slough.

Martin explained that the sensible way of soldering surface mount components manually is to smear the pins with solder paste, position the chips on the board and run a hot air gun over them to heat all the pins simultaneously. The chips should then sink into the molten solder, making good contact all round.

The returned machine proved that the technique had worked, but I was still curious as to why the chip hadn't been fried. Martin explained that surface mount boards are dipped in molten solder during the manufacturing process, and survive quite happily - it's internal heat from the chip that causes damage.

Martin also said the older technique used in pin-through-hole circuit boards involved inserting all the components, often by hand, and then running the board across waves of flux and solder. As the board crossed the crests, the pads were first cleaned and then soldered to the protruding wires.

The new technique, however, involves mounting the components and then immersing the entire board to melt the solder and connect the components. The advantage in the more modern process lies in the cost of component positioning – much can be done by machine.

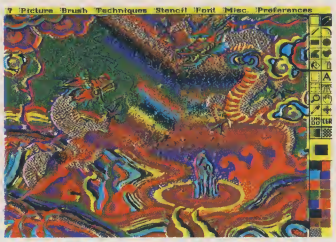
The main problem, though, is to get both the small single components and the large, square packaged chips (such as the 286 and 386 processors) soldered cleanly. To address the variable size of the components, boards are often pre-heated to get the chips up to temperature before soldering.

Having heard the description of board construction, it's little wonder that a trumped-up hair dryer can do little harm.

DELUXE PAINT II ENHANCED

Deluxe Paint II is bundled with PC products and has become cheaper with the release of *Deluxe Paint II Enhanced*. This has a number of features over the earlier program, including poster-sized prints, sculpted colour fonts, and use of extended VGA modes for higher resolution. You can wrap a picture round a shape, fill an area with any of six types of gradient fill and colour existing black and white pictures in the same way some of the best silent movies have been ruined.

Tasters of the sculpted fonts have been supplied with the package, but a full set of nine styles in two sizes and eight colours is available from Electronic Arts for £49.99. They're called Kara Fonts. Order on 0753 40906.



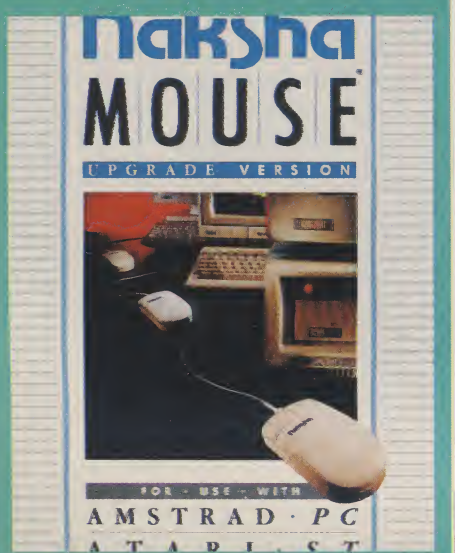
• Deluxe Paint II Enhanced: *suppoerts enhanced VGA modes*

FEELING A BIT NAKSHAED

You may have noticed an extensive advertising campaign in the computer press recently for the Naksha mouse. This is a product of a Taiwanese corporation and one scurried onto my desk the other day as part of a mouse survey.

The main claim to fame of the Naksha, apart from being a nice Microsoft-compatible three-button mouse, is that it can be used with the PC, Atari ST and Commodore Amiga without any adaptation other than plug converters. At a price of £46, this looks like a good offer if you have more than one of the three machines.

The version that came to me, however, was PC and PS/2 specific. It arrived complete with a mouse holster, PS/2 converter and a copy of *Deluxe Paint II*. This program is a whole heap better than either *PC Paintbrush* or *DR Halo*, the staple fair of mouse suppliers. The whole package costs £92, making *Deluxe Paint II* around £46; not a bad deal for a top paint package.



• Naksha – it comes with extras

DIE HARD

Not out until January
Die Hard • £24.99

So you've seen the film and read the book, now you can play the game with Activision's adaptation of the recently released block-busting Twentieth Century Fox thriller, *Die Hard*.

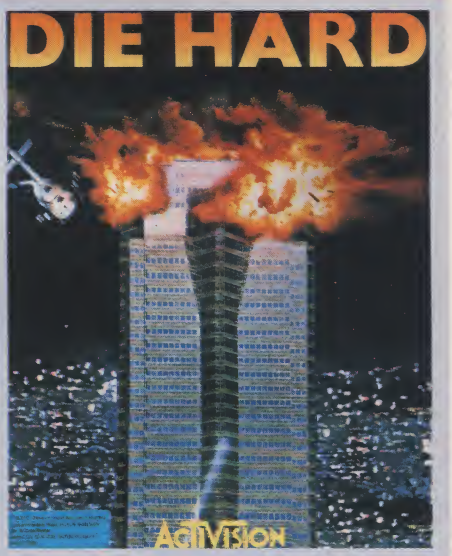
The film (and the game) sees New York cop, John McClane (played by Bruce 'Moonlighting' Willis) single handedly trying to thwart the dastardly efforts of a band of international terrorists, who have taken control of a skyscraper in order to rob the Nakatomi corporation of $600 million in bonds.

Most software houses would have taken one look at the story line of *Die Hard* and thought to themselves, 'platform game'. Not so Activision, as the game utilises some of the most impressive 3D graphics yet seen on the PC. Gameplay involves stealthily moving around the maze of rooms and corridors that make up the top eight levels of the Nakatomi building, killing terrorists as and when they appear. There's a lot more to it than this however, as the game also includes a strong strategy element.

Once you've survived the various harzards along the way (exploding roof tops, unfriendly FBI agents etc), the game eventually ends with you taking on your enemy Karl, and once he is disposed of, you're up against the leader of the lot, Hans Gruber.

Die Hard follows the film in every last detail (you even get the pleasure of dropping the bomb down the lift shaft to see the entire lower floors blown out!). Although the gameplay is pretty average, scintillating graphics and well thought-out puzzles make _Die Hard_ a choice after-Christmas present for any PC owner – fans of the film will particularly enjoy it!

Die Hard runs on any PC compatible (8MHz or more recommended) with at least 512K. Screen modes supported are CGA, EGA and VGA (in EGA emulation).



• Die Hard: *scintillating and well thought-out*

SKYFAX FROM CELLPHONES

If you're into Power Christmases, you'll be interested in the latest Zenith goodies for the SupersPort series of laptops. Not content with an internal modem which can also send faxes (and Skyfaxes via satellite), they've now added a cellular phone link so you can send them from your Balian outrigger or from the top of a Myan temple.

Trusting only that your batteries are charged, you can now send or receive a fax from virtually anywhere in the globe, including any spot on the M25, if the Zenith pamphlet is to be believed.

SOFTKICKER UPDATE

I talked with Nigel Grant of the Ctrl Alt Deli about *The SoftKicker*. This handy utility transforms the use of *Ventura Publisher* by fooling the program into displaying a portion of an enlarged screen onto an EGA or VGA display. This gives you an effective resolution of 1024 x 1024, similar to that found on A4 and A3 DTP monitors, but restricts the display to a small proportion of the page. Nonetheless, for most DTP uses this is ideal.

The good news is that Nigel has discovered that the same version of the program can be used to give this kind of enhancement to GEM, and all the applications that run under it.

All you have to do is replace your normal EGA or VGA driver with the one that works for *Ventura*. Nigel said he had his copy working with GEM, and I've no reason to doubt him, but when I tried it there was a large black band across the middle of the screen and some corruption down the left-hand side.

On the *Ventura* version, I had to try a couple of alternative graphics adapters in the *SoftKicker* installation before getting rid of these kind of effects. This is probably the same problem in evidence on the GEM setup.

If it does prove to be OK, it opens up a whole new field for the £79 product. More people use GEM out there than use *Ventura*. Contact the Ctrl Alt Deli on 0908 662759.

POWER UP! DTP

If you're still looking for PC goodies for under the tree this year, this one wouldn't go amiss. Those interesting people at Power Up! have just released a challenge to budget DTPs like *Timeworks* and *Finesse*.

The new package, *Express Publisher* offers many similar features, like linked frames, auto-hyphenation, paragraph styles, and page to page text flow. It also offers a wide selection of fonts and clip-art, which can be printed on 9-pin, 24-pin and laser printers. Indeed, the laser offerings are at the full 300 dpi resolution of the printer. Priced at £149.95, the product is available from Power Up! on 0276 65272.

QUICK FLIP

If you're in a sub-directory and want to move to another sub-directory with the same parent, you can do this in one step with the `CD ..\<directory name>` command. The `..\` is vital

Simon Williams

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SPECTRUM

JUMPING GENLOCK

I wondered when someone would get round to this. Video Vault, large Speccy repair outfit, has just announced a 128K upgrade for 48K owners. Consisting of an add-on module and internal modification, the upgrade will supposedly give a full 128K of rippling memory as well as a parallel printer port and sound through your TV.

Price will apparently be around £70 which includes the necessary surgery to your 48K. Before you decide a celebratory sample of the Christmas liquor is in order, I must confess I've got a nagging feeling about incompatibility problems.

Full details should appear in a column in the near future but in the meantime try contacting Video Vault at Old Kingsmoor School, Railway Street, Hadfield, Cheshire SK14 8AA.

A BETTER CODE

Codemasters could be forgiven for doing a bit of laurel resting at the moment, what with the innovative and cheap CD package that has just been sprung upon us.

But, never ones to pass up the opportunity of adding a few more quid to the already considerable family fortune, Codemasters has floated a brand new label that should keep skint and/or miserly Speccy owners happy, at least for a while.

Cartoon Time is the cutesy style name under which games will be offered up for the price of £2.99. First titles due for release include *Frankenstein Jnr*, *Olli and Lissa 3* and a new adventure starring that Dizzy character.

Apparently, each Cartoon Time game will have its own unique number and be part of a Collector's series, which sounds like a cunning ruse to persuade a nation of young gamesplayers to collect the complete set of 7,499,739 planned titles.

Codemasters will also be keeping its arcade action end up with games like *MIG 29*, *SuperBike Trans-Am*, *Operation Gunship* and *Super Tank Simulator* all due to hit a shop shelf near you soon under the Codemasters label.

'PROSE IN MOTION

One underhyped coin-op conversion that might well have passed you by, but is worth getting hold of, is Microprose's *Xenophobe*, an unimposing yet fairly addictive viewed-from-the-side shoot-'em-up with distinct adventury overtones and a two player option.

The mission you chose to accept in this one was the removal of the many, varied and excellently drawn, alien life forms who have taken over five deep space stations. It's good this – and let's hope Microprose decides to supplement the usual quota of military simulations with a few more equally well written arcade conversions.

IS ANYBODY OUT THERE?

D.J. Keeler of Kent has just written to tell me he owns a 48K Spectrum and a 5.25-inch Cumana disk drive, which he joins together with an interface made by Watford Electronics.

What he wants to know is whether there's a user group serving the owners of his particular drive interface. I've searched my extensive archives but unfortunately drew a blank.

If you can write an address for the group in question and send it to him, D.J. would be very grateful. He's also very keen to hear from other people with the same set-up. His address is 84 Taswell Road, Rainham, Kent. ME8 8HP.

TIP TOP OFFERS

Topologika has just had a sudden attack of Christmas spirit. Until February 28th, each one of the quite well liked games will be available at the reduced price of £11.95 (including VAT and p&p). There's also money to be saved if you buy in bulk with orders for two or more titles qualifying for a 10 per cent discount, three or more games 20 per cent and four or more 30 per cent.

Titles on offer include: *Acheton*, *Kingdom of Hamil*, *Countdown to Doom*, *Return to Doom*, *Philosopher's Quest*, *Avon* (the latest, based around the works of good old Shaky himself), *Giant Killer* (a maths adventure for 9 to 13 year olds) and an economic simulation called *Yes! Chancellor*, which provides an opportunity for a nearly topical political joke which I can't fulfil.

If you desire to know more, contact Topologika on 0733 244682 for more-further details.

Robin Alway

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO HAVE DIZZY SPELLS

I know that lovable (?), fun (?) and cuddly (?) character Dizzy has been mercilessly torturing many of you in his latest, very impossible game – *Treasure Island Dizzy*. So here are a few hints, courtesy of kind-hearted Matthew Wilson.

Solid Chest – when dropped by side of cliff, you can stand on it and jump over cliff.

Clump of mushrooms – no use.

Sinclair Abuser mag – drop in water for a score bonus.

Tube of toothpaste – no use.

Rubber Snorkel – enables Dizzy to breathe underwater.

Glass Sword – drop on gravestone to open an entrance.

The Woodcutters Axe – drop on bridge to go under it.

Salt Water Spade – drop on the wobbling bridge in the sea to release bubbles. Use them to get past cave.

Bucket – give this to shopkeeper.

Look behind objects for the gold coins. There is one behind the clump of mushrooms in the forest and behind the skull in the sea. There are many behind various plants as well as the fencing on the tree houses and behind the trees.

PCW

THE GIFT OF SPEECH

Voice recognition systems are decades away – and just as well. If my PCW learned what I shout at it most of the time, it would speak filthier language than a pub parrot.

SM Engineering's upgraded widget, however, can make your PCW speak to you, after a fashion. The £35 module plugs on the back of the monitor into the expansion port (unlike the previous version which was a board you had to wire in yourself) and effectively provides a voice for your machine.

Using simple BASIC commands (it won't work from *LocoScript*) you can program it to make little sounds – aah and ooh and ba so on – and so speak to the user. This could be used for educational packages for kids, for disabled users, for guiding inexperienced users through your program, or even for fun.

Details from SCA on 0323 766262.

TYPE CASTING

Dave Rodgers of Wolverhampton asks me if there are any typing tutor programs for the PCW he's just bought. I have to agree with Dave that typing proficiency is an invaluable skill to have, not just for word processing, but for computing in general. Using any computer, but a PCW especially, without basic keyboard familiarity is like finding your way around London without an A to Z.

Anyway, the two I'd recommend are both by Iankey. There's the *Crash Course* for £24.95, and *Two Fingers Touch Typing* (for those of us who would like to use the other eight of our fingers and thumbs) for the same price. Iansyst is on 01-607 0187.

BASIC BONANZA

If you're using BASIC, you can switch drives from within BASIC by typing

[illegible]

and you can of course select a program from any drive by typing

[illegible]

for example – that's right, you don't need the final quote mark, or to specify the .BAS extension. You can save a BASIC listing under any name, not necessarily ending in .BAS. For example:

[illegible]

and subsequently

[illegible]

ON AND ON

Glad to see that Barry Young, Amstrad's new UK boss, is as confident about the future of the PCW as we are, according to the interview he gave *Express* last week. It seems that the PC200, which some people said would be coming out bundled with *LocoScript* and a printer to make a sort of MSDOS, PC compatible PCW, won't be after all. Amstrad will probably ditch the machine next year in the British market – leaving the good old faithful PCW to carry the banner.

Basil Pigg

MSX

COMPETITION TIME

Attention MSX programmers! Vernon Wyland, who runs MSX Public Domain Software, will be holding a contest in which he hopes to find the best MSX programmer for 1990.

This competition, open to anyone, offers the substantial prize of £100.00. And as the prizes won't be awarded until sometime between August/November of next year, there is plenty of time for you MSX programmers to get writing, and no excuse if you don't write anything. The best routines should then become available via the Library, for all to enjoy.

For more details of the competition and the PDS, send an SAE to 396 Park Lane, Maghull, Merseyside L31 1HQ, or telephone 051531 7497.

SOFTWARE ABOUNDS

M.P.T. Computers Ltd of London is having a Christmas clear out, and the following titles are available at bargain prices.

Firstly, for the MSX 1, computer games: *Break In*, *Gardic*, *Relics*, and *American Truck* (similar to *Road Fighter*) are all on offer.

And for the MSX 2, there's *Super Tritorn*, *Rastan Saga*, *Androgynus*, *Ikari Warrior*, *Deep Forest*, and one title on 3.5-inch disk, *Testament*.

As the games are all Japanese imports, they are supplied on ROM, apart from *Testament*, and most are of a very high quality. But, cut the comment: how much are the games?

All these titles were about £24.95, but are now £14.95 each, or if you purchase two or more, they are then £9.95 each, although p&p will be about £1.00 extra.

Contact MPT computers, 26 Wycombe Gardens, London, Tel: 01-458 3310.

Keith Neal

THE SHORT LIST

Here is another short routine, from Andy McIntosh of Halstead

```
10 SCREEN 1 :WIDTH 29:KEYOFF
20 COLOR 1,5,5:LOCATE8,9
30 FOR A=BASE (6)+8 TO BASE
   (6)+10:VPOKE A,&HF5:NEXT
40 PRINT"PLEASEWAIT",,,
   TAB(6);"PROGRAM LOADING"
50 A=PEEK(&HF3FA)+
   PEEK(&HF3FB)*256
60 POKE A,13:GOSUB 130
70 POKE A,82:GOSUB 130
80 POKE A,85:GOSUB 130
90 POKE A,78:GOSUB 130
100 POKE A,13:GOSUB 130
110 H=INT(A/256) :L=A-H*256:POKE
    &HF3F8,L:POKE &HF3F9,H
120 CLOAD
130 IF A=&HFC17 THEN A=&HFBFO
    ELSE A=A+1:RETURN
```

This will allow BASIC programs to be loaded and then they will auto run. Before saving your BASIC program, this short program should be saved using the save command eg SAVE" game".

BBC

A SONG OF PRAISE

Some people see computers simply as a hobby. Most take the opposite view, however: that the computer is a tool that helps in the pursuit of real interests.

Speaking sociologically, the use of computers has drastically altered many leisure activities, and nowhere is this more true than in music. Computers and music are practically synonymous, thanks to Stock Aitken & Waterman, The Art of Noise and many others.

The BBC Model B was one of the first musical computers because of its legendary expansibility and ease of programming, and the Model B is still a very popular instrument in the eyes and ears of musicians today.

Hybrid Technology has been marketing musical add-ons for the BBC for most of our venerable machine's lifetime with Music 500, and the later 5000 system. Now from Hybrid comes the 3000 expander, which adds a further 16 sound channels, giving a total of 32.

These add-ons can be used for many purposes, including quadraphonic sound, and 16 voice polyphony on the dedicated Music 4000 keyboard. The price is £100, which is a little steep for the hobbyist market, but ideal for the semi-professional musician, who finds himself on a tight budget.

ON OTHER HORIZONS

Topologika is another software house that has had associations with the BBC for a long time. And the latest news from Topologika includes a repeat of last year's special Christmas offer, whereby discount on adventure games increases progressively the more you buy – two games gets a 10 per cent discount, three gets a 20 per cent reduction, and four a 30 per cent saving.

Totally new on the other hand is *Untrivia – Catch Up With Your Maths*. This package comes in two parts, for which you have to pay separately. A system disk has an example quiz plus generator program, and there are quiz disks, three of them, covering ages up to fifteen and beyond.

Also new is *Astro*, which is an interactive encyclopedia (not my words). Neither package is available until early 1990, so reviews will appear as and when I receive example copies.

A READER WRITES

Reader Neil Person who wrote to me a little while back asking about desktop publishing for the BBC writes back to say 'Thanks', but with more questions.

Neil's problem is that he needs software to work with his Star LC10 (an excellent colour printer). And the solution depends on the workings of his software (*Image*).

Often a BASIC program calls the dump routine with a 'star' command, eg

```
. . . . . .
```

All you need to do is insert the correct dump in its place. I've sent an LC10 specific routine to Neil.

If this routine can't be done, then it may be better to write a short program that calls the printer dump of choice after loading the appropriate screen file.

Andrew Brown

CPC

WATCHING THE PENNIES

SD Microsystems is one of the CPC's more prolific serious software producers. And the latest product to roll off the SD production line and onto the market is *Home Executive*.

Home Executive consists of an entire suite of programs. Central – and arguably most important – is the personal ledger. This will keep track of all your income (rare, in my case) and outgoings (altogether less rare), as well as handling credit card payments and standing orders. The ledger even has password protection, so your dearly beloved won't find out exactly how much you spend on computer games, cigarettes and beer.

The filer acts as a sort of card-index system. You can carry out fairly simple searches, but more complex database-type functions are beyond it.

Slightly less useful is the shopping list feature. This lets you draw up a list of goodies to pick up next time you set off for Safeway. Quite why you can't write it all out longhand is beyond me, but at least the printout will be nice and neat. No more claiming you mistook 'two dozen brown eggs' for 'two dozen brown ales'. Ah well.

Possibly least useful of all is the pop-up calculator. It's only a simple four-function affair and hardly seems worth loading up when you could do the same job faster with a pocket calculator.

There are several other utilities supplied with *Home Executive*. The diary and calendar functions let you produce Filofax-sized printouts, while an interest and depreciation calculator promises to be as useful as the shopping list and caculator put together.

Home Executive costs £19.95 on disk only. Add another £1 for p&p and you're still not paying a lot for a package which sets out to do a lot. The fact that it only just succeeds is a shame, but you still get plenty for your money. SD Microsystems is at PO Box 24, Hitchin, Herts SG4 0AE.

OP WOLF II

Ocean's *Operation Wolf* was reckoned to be one of the CPC's most vicious blasts, but its successor, *Operation Thunderbolt* makes it look like a Sunday school outing.

The action in the sequel follows broadly similar lines of the original, with your gung-ho hero battling against all odds to free some hostages. The difference between *Thunderbolt* and *Wolf* is the new game's extra variations and a splendid two-player mode.

While *Wolf* offered a number of levels but just one basic perspective – a simple left/right scroll – *Thunderbolt* gives you additional headaches. Apart from *Wolf*-type stand and blast sequences, you're also sent racing down roads and up rivers, fighting against enemies who step in from the side as well as charge at you from the horizon.

The two-player mode is perhaps the greatest improvement, however. The screen, even during normal play, has an invisible split down the middle. Enemy troops in the 'other' half of the screen won't actually fire at you. It's not until they step into your half you need to shoot them.

So when two of you are on the case, the fighting becomes frenetic and the game's full potential is exploited. You can choose to co-operate or not with your colleague, as protective jackets and laser sights become available only once per level. Either way, the action is so intense, the firepower so colossal, that the uninitiated will find themselves confronted with a totally confusing wall of exploding pixels.

If you think of it purely as a game, *Operation Thunderbolt* is a polished and highly enjoyable blast for those moments when you want to switch your brain off and your reflexes on.

Think of it as a barometer of social conscience, of course, and it becomes an entirely different, somewhat worrying, matter.

BE A BRAIN SURGEON!

You may have noticed that this column is not usually graced with adventure games reviews.

Indeed, I hate spending ten days plodding through a be-forested landscape picking up coins, charms, scrolls etc and then being suddenly decapitated by some mystic wizard you could have taken out easily with one drop from that magic phial you chucked in the flamin' sea 2,534 moves ago!

Right, now that I've got that off my chest, I'll tell you about *Scapeghost*. It's Level 9's latest adventure for the CPC, and may prove to be the best.

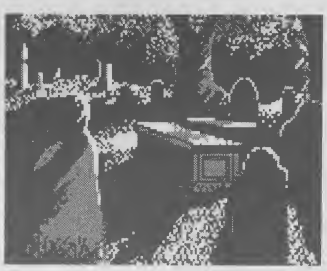
You play the part of Alan Chance, and it's your job not only to show the police that you are not a bungling oaf after all, but that you also are equipped to help apprehend nefarious baddies and to rescue your girlfriend Sarah – who they've kidnapped – into the bargain.

The adventure is split into three parts, corresponding with your activities on three consecutive nights. You have to solve each part before you can advance to the next.

The graphics are very good, and the plot itself is interesting. I've worked out how to get the game loaded without being killed, so the review is imminent.

Rod Lawton

• Operation Thunderbolt: vicious, enjoyable



• Scapeghost – it has a good plot

YOUR FORMAT

ST 10
Amiga 11
PC 12
Spectrum 14
PCW 14
MSX 14
BBC 15
CPC 15
Atari 8-bit 18
QL 18
Archimedes 18
C64 18

ANNOUNCING THE NEXT GENERATION OF PBP GAMES

STEVE JACKSON'S

GLADIATORS

OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE

Your opponent falls!
He's badly wounded!
He can't continue!
Yes! HABET!

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FIGHT YOUR FRIENDS TO THE DEATH! USE MATCH-UP CODES!

If you wish to fight a friend through the *Gladiators of the Roman Empire* computer, you must first of all:

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COMBAT SYSTEM

Dial in two numbers from 1-4 each combat round to represent where you will attack and defend. 1-2-3-4 equals Head-Body-Arms-Legs. The computer does the rest. Listen to the commentary to find out whether your attack was successful. Hint: The area you choose to defend is not the only area you guard. You will also defend one of the two adjacent areas as well.

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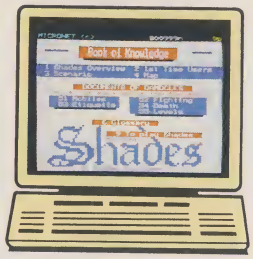
We now have software for all popular machines, from the Spectrum to PC compatibles, including the Atari ST and the Amiga.

INFORMATION

Micronet is also a computer magazine. Our computer news area is updated every day, so there's no better way to stay up-to-date, and our software reviews and features for all popular micros mean Micronet members are always better informed.

Add to this Prestel's massive database and you'll have all the facts at your fingertips.



ENTERTAINMENT

But Micronet is not just informative, it's also a lot of fun! As a member you'll have access to a range of games, including the UK's most popular multi-user game, Shades, where the action is live and so are your opponents!

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Tel. No.: _____

Machine Type: _____

NCE 16

MICRONET

Free modem offer available in the UK only to new members while stocks last. Minimum subscription period 1 year.

QL

BIBLICAL QL

PDQL has just announced the availability of the King James version of the Old and New Testaments of The Bible on seven QDOS disks. The text is in ASCII form, and can therefore be read from the screen by loading it into a text editor or word processor. *Quill* would probably be too slow – PDQL recommends *The Editor* or *Text87*. A comprehensive index is provided, with Adultery as the first entry!

The price is £45, from PDQL, 1 Heaton House, Camden Street, Birmingham. B1 3BZ. Tel: 021-200 2313.

Of course, King James's copyright expired several hundred years ago, so the text of The Bible is in the public domain. Customers will be paying for the media and the index, which must have taken a lot of work, even with the assistance of a computer.

QUILL TIP

My thanks to John Silk of PDQL for the following tip.

If you are working on a large document, and need to move a sizeable block of text elsewhere, you have probably found that it takes a lot of time using the standard method. Instead, set the page length to zero, and put a page break at the beginning and end of the block of text to be moved. Then print the page containing the text to be moved to a file, and import it at the new position.

QUANTA LIBRARY

The November issue of the *Quanta* newsletter included a listing of the additions to the software library. Here are a few of the goodies now available:

A dictionary of 50,483 words. This is the dictionary used with the Sector Software *Spellbound* spelling checker.

A file transfer program that sends files between the QL and the Z88 (in both directions), via the serial ports. A similar program is available for file transfer between the QL and PC.

A new version of the powerful Micro EMACS text editor.

Contact Phil Borman on 0472 349850 if you are interested in joining Quanta.

HOW TO KNACKER YOUR QL!

Tony Firshman of TF Services recently told me a horror story about a QL that had been sent to him for repair. The owner had attempted to fit a replacement keyboard. Finding that the two halves of the case wouldn't fit together properly, he had obviously 'persuaded' them with a large hammer!

Some gigantic holes had been drilled in the case over the power supply heat sink, to improve the cooling. Bits of plastic littering the interior of the machine indicated that the owner hadn't even removed the top of the case to perform this piece of surgery!

John Torofex

C64

DEATH OF A MAGAZINE

Sad news reached me the other day, concerning one of the small band of magazines that cater almost exclusively for users of the Commodore 64. The magazine in question is, or rather was, *Your Commodore*.

From the January 1990 issue (and I quote from an official communication) the magazine will be known as *VC* and will be '100 per cent entertainments', which I take to mean as being 100 per cent full of reviews.

Serious users and programmers, we are told, will have to switch to *Commodore Disk User*, which is all very well if you have a disk drive. If you're a tape person, then Argus has slammed the door in your face: shame, too.

SPEAK TO ME

There was a brief mention of word processors last week, but if you're the sort of person who wants a word processor for your C64 that talks to you (honestly), then try to get a look at the *Write Stuff* package from ... no, not the squeaky clean New Kids On The Block ... Busy Bee Software.

Write Stuff is currently on special offer at £19.99 from Croftward Ltd.; for further details, write to them at 40 Bowling Green Lane, London. EC1R 0NE. Any WP used to produce its own manual can't be bad.

READ THIS MAG

There are around half a dozen utilities for helping you write adventure games on the Commodore 64, and those of you who are unaware of the existence of a fanzine devoted to helping you use those utilities (and others, it covers all computers), can read on for further engaging enlightenment.

The aforementioned fanzine is called *Adventure Coder*, and it is edited by one Christopher Hester (write and tell him how good Isaac Asimov is: you'll get a very nice reply); Chris lives at 3 West Lane, Baildon, Nr. Shipley, West Yorkshire BD17 5HD.

The mag is actually produced on a Commodore 64, comes out every month, and costs £1.00 per issue. Chris is a great adventure and computer enthusiast, and I can heartily recommend *Adventure Coder*.

TAKE A PEEK

Many of you will know the method of using `A=PEEK(197)` to see which key is currently being pressed on the keyboard. Surprisingly few people, however, seem to know that other keys that don't respond to this location, like the shift keys, logo key and Control key, can also be detected by taking a peek at location 653. Give these techniques a whirl and see what happens!

Pete Gerrard

XE

CASSETTE CAPERS

Atari machines have a cassette port, like the one used by arch-rival Commodore, that is non-standard and only intended for use with the cassette player manufactured by Atari. You cannot connect any other cassette machine to it.

Unfortunately, the Atari cassette is not the most robust of devices (with the exception of the XC12) and frequently suffers button breakages etc. I have an XC12 and while using it recently, my 130XE started producing strange error messages indicating that the cassette was not providing data for the computer to read. To cut a long story short, it turned out to be the metal connectors on the end of the serial lead.

The connectors had become dirty, having had much use. After trying several substances in an attempt to restore them to working order, I found that ordinary methylated spirits was the best solvent for the job. So the next time your XC12 or other Atari cassette won't transfer data to your computer, dab a little meths onto the serial lead using a cotton bud – it works wonders!

SECOND DISK

One of the best ways to get the most from large RAM memories is to use a RAM disk. This is a portion of RAM which is set aside and used exactly like an ordinary disk drive. Using the RAM disk, you can have all the benefits of a very fast second drive and use the RAM more effectively.

Edmund Blake

ARCHIMEDES

MORE PD TO YOUR ELBOW

Peter Sykes has responded to my request for samples of PD software with two disks full of goodies, from games to utilities, to jokes – some lewd – to a decent demo from the wittily named Brothers in ARM. This shows what can be done with fancy scroll routines and borrowed fonts and music.

Speaking generally, why do demos have to go on for so long? The effect was certainly attractive for the first couple of minutes.

But I wonder why he does not capitalise on the technique to put to some more profitable purpose - like a game or graphics program?

Anyway, Peter Sykes lives at 96 Lanehouse Road, Thornaby, Cleveland TS17 8EA and he will send you one of the disks he sent me in exchange for any of the following:

A blank disk plus a cheque for 75p
A cheque for £1.50
A disk of PD software

If Peter takes on the software on a PD disk, he pays 1p per 10K for each copy he supplies. This sounds fair enough.

Peter's also looking for a welcome screen/menu for his wares and will pay a royalty for this. If you've written a program that can be suitably amended for a wide variety of disks, contact Peter.

It would be nice to be able to compile a list of PD outlets for the Arc in this column. Anyone else who can supply, please let me know and send a sample.

The ST and Amiga have PD libraries, but the Arc's are just beginning.

SETTING IT STRAIGHT

I have to take Uncle Techtip to task for his 'Sparc of genius' piece in *Express* a couple of weeks back. He was describing the Cypress Semiconductors new Sparc Risc chip, the snappily-named 7C601, which can produce 29 MIPS at 40 MHz. The Arc, according to Tippy, produces a 'measly 4 MIPS'.

While this assertion is true of the ARM2 chip in the standard Arc, the ARM3 produces close on four times this rate. The chip itself is running at 20MHz, half that of the Sparc chip. At the same speed as the 7C601, therefore, the ARM3 would outpace it.

Before I get thousands of Sun Workstation users writing in, I'm aware that the ARM3 doesn't run at 40MHz, but speed increases of this kind are never as hard to achieve as redesigning CPU.

BIG MONEY

It may interest you to know that a SCSI hard disk controller card for a PC can be bought for under £40. The circuitry for this is no more complex than that needed for the Arc.

Why then are Arc SCSI interfaces £200 or more? Someone is making some big money somewhere.

With the cheaper interface goes a cheaper hard disk, with prices around £200 for a 30Mb unit. A full PC system therefore costs around £250. There is very little reason why an Arc system shouldn't cost around the same.

Anyone bold enough to break what seems like a price cartel would make up in sales volume what they might lose in unit price.

MACH TECH BROKE

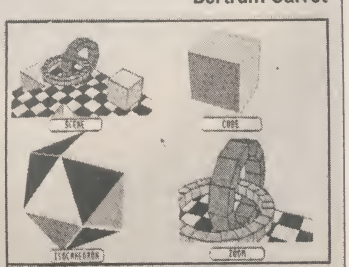
Mach Technology, which this column warned you about earlier this year (you heard it here first, folks), has been wound up, with the Fraud Squad showing a healthy interest.

It seems that the bright new products advertised so heavily in the last few months either couldn't or weren't being made. So no hardware PC emulator, BASIC compiler or any of the other goodies.

I spoke to one of the directors once, who claimed that the brains behind the scheme were Cambridge teachers and lecturers putting things together for the machine they loved (my words, not his).

This all seemed very plausible, until you started to add up the cost of taking double-page colour spreads in monthly computer mags month after month!

Bertrum Carrot



• Hyper Base: from defunct Mach Tech

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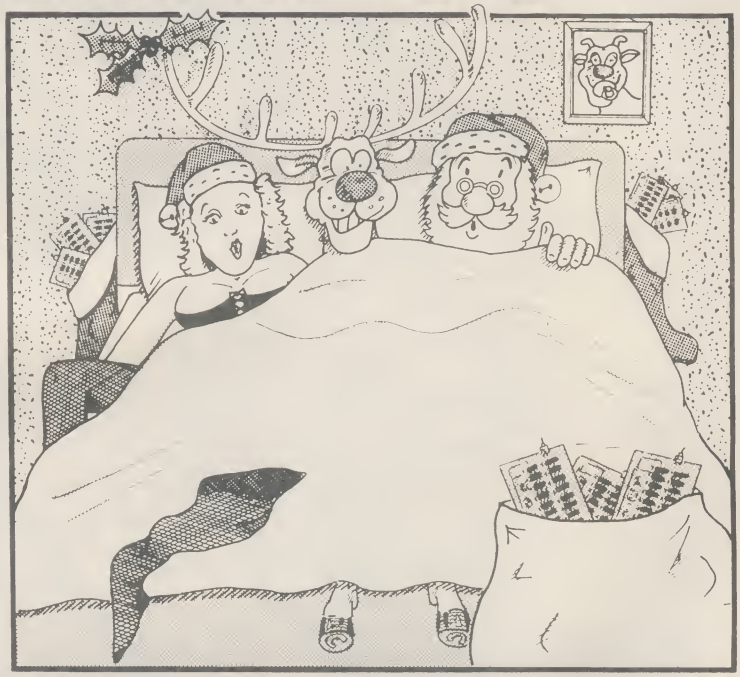

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Screen shots from Amiga version.

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THE SHOPPING EXPRESS BUYER'S GUIDE TO DTP, GRAPHICS AND DIGITISERS

The computer has revolutionised the publishing industry. With some software and a few hardware add-ons it's now possible to create entire documents on screen, complete with photographs and illustrations. To find out what's available, read on...

From paste-up to PostScript, the world of desktop publishing has arrived on your micro. So whether its a club newssheet or a magazine like *Express*, there's a variety of packages to suit your needs.

Desktop publishing sells computers. Its massive growth in recent years on the Apple Macintosh and PCs has spawned a wide range of products for other micros. But you could easily spend £10,000 on a system so what should you look for if you've only a few hundred at your disposal? *Express* looks at the DTP packages that will allow you to input, import and edit text and graphics in a friendly environment. Last week we looked at scanners, so for good measure we also include a round-up of another means of importing pictorial material into your publishing efforts – digitisers.

PC DTP GUIDE

It's best to go for GEM-based DTP packages as they all offer output to dot-matrix and laser printers – and the device-independent, page description language PostScript used by professional printing companies.

● VENTURA PUBLISHER V2

Rank Xerox • 0895 51133
£914

A GEM-based heavyweight supporting documents up to 999 pages, and offering master templates, style sheets and text import. A comprehensive range of features with precise control over layout and typography ideally suited for technical applications.

▲ Complete PC DTP for business and technical documents
▲ Fully automated text entry and layout

▼ Can't flow text around graphics
▼ Expensive

Value for money ★★★★

● PAGEMAKER 3

Aldus Europe • 031-336 1727
£800

Running under Microsoft Windows and geared towards the pro-graphics designer, needs a 286 or 386 for effective use. Documents can be up to 128 pages, text can be flowed around graphics very easily and the package includes colour support. Perhaps most useful, parts of pages can be worked on separately and then combined when completed.

▲ Allows simultaneous control of different page components
▲ Easy to use with its pop-up menus

▼ A little slow even on fast PCs
▼ Price

Value for money ★★★

● FINESSE 2

Logi UK • 0925 413501
£171

Once known as *AMS*, this GEM-based package works with frames, but treats input or imported text and graphics separately and colour codes them. Documents may be up to 16 pages, and masters and paragraph styles can be pre-recorded for fast layout.

▲ Flexible with many useful features
▲ Good manual with excellent tips on design

▼ Limited typefaces

Value for money ★★★★

● JETSETTER 4

Garbo Systems • 0736 67166
£399

A wide variety of fonts and text sizes up to 750 point make *Jetsetter* unique. Separate menu driven screens for graphics and text allow good control of graphics but limited text editing functions. However graphics are bitmapped and can't be resized larger than the original

▲ Excellent with a laser printer
▲ Versatile graphics handling

▼ Difficult text editing

Value for money ★★★

● TIMEWORKS DTP

GST/Timeworks • 0954 81991
£129
ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ATARI ST

One of the first medium priced DTP packages, GEM based and compatible with the wide range of Bitstream Fontware. A frame based system incorporating master templates, paragraph styles, page guides and automatic text wrap-around graphics. *Timeworks* also includes a a good range of drawing facilities and is able to handle documents up to 999 pages.

▲ Excellent DTP at budget price
▲ Imports wide range of text and pictures

Value for money ★★★★★

● FLEET STREET EDITOR

Mirrorsoft • 01-928 1454
£184
ALSO AVAILABLE FOR ATARI ST,AMSTRAD PCW, AMSTRAD CPC, BBC

A GEM style package, Bitstream font compatible, but generally slower to use than real GEM DTPs. Both text and Graphics can be manipulated on the same screen and overlap each other. A wide selection of clip art is supplied but the working document has to be reloaded before insertion.

▲ Good clip art selection
▲ Wide file format supported

▼ No automatic reflowing of text
▼ Relatively slow and unfriendly

Value for money ★★

● GEM DESKTOP PUBLISHER 2

Digital Research • 0635 35304
£397

You might expect something special from GEM's authors but what you get is a package which is very memory intensive although offering the usual page layout, paragraph tags and frame-based text formatting. On the plus side, it does include good text and graphics import and the rare ability on PCs to alter spacing between words.

▲ Inexpensive frame formatting
▲ Flexible text handling

▼ Slow

Value for money ★★

AMIGA DTP

● PUBLISHER'S CHOICE

HB Marketing • 0895 444433
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Coming complete with the *Kindwords* word processor, the *PageSetter* text and graphics editor, a disk of headline fonts and the *LaserScript* utility that configures your documents as PostScript compatible, this really is a choice product. Working on the frame and grid principle, *PC* provides separate text, graphics and layout screens with the useful addition of full feature pasting facility.

▲ An comprehensive package
▲ Includes spell checker and thesaurus

▼ Slight lack of integration between component parts

Value for money ★★★★★

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Mannesman Sheetfeeder.....£62
Mannesman Serial Interface £49

REPAIRS FOR AMIGA AND ATARI

● PROFESSIONAL PAGE

HB Marketing • 0895 444433
£249.50

Based on the industry standard, *Pagemaker*, frame-based documents can be picked up moved off page and re-pasted at will and at ease. Supporting text flow, zooms, handy drawing utilities and high-resolution bitmapped graphics, *PP* also offers colour separation control – all at an amazingly low price. There's a page review mode and PostScript printing is also catered for.

▲ Excellent value for money
▲ Perfect for high-resolution pages and colour separation

▼ Needs two drives or a hard disk

Value for money ★★★★★

● PAGESTREAM

Silica Systems • 01-309 1111
£171.35

A frame based package, which also uniquely allows you to rotate text and graphics material in three dimensions. Aside from the usual DTP features, page view, variable zooms, automatic text wraps, and a range of text styles make the product very comprehensive.

▲ A wide range of flexible control
▲ Unique 3D text and graphics handling

▼ Limited colour separation

Value for money ★★★★★

● CITY DESK

Precision Software • 01-330 7166
£157

A different approach offers the user a column-based formatting package in which imported text can be shunted around the page as if it were a graphic object but font, sizing and style attributes are messy. A rather simplistic graphic editor does it business adequately enough but despite some power, CD suffers from the lack of a GEM-type interface.

▲ A powerful low-cost package
▲ PostScript supported

▼ Formatting commands entered as code
▼ Terrible manual complements a difficult interface

Value for money ★★★

● SHAKESPEARE

Cloudhall • 0604 231 2111
£99

The only budget DTP package that allows colour on the page to be carried through to hard copy also supports mono PostScript output and is frame-based. However there's no zoom facility and font,style and size attributes are lost when text is reflowed. IFF colour graphics can be imported but not HAM, however 32 colours can be displayed on screen and palettes changed accordingly.

▲ Ideal for colour printer owners
▲ Accurate text positioning

▼ No format data can be imported with text
▼ No drawing tools included

Value for money ★★★

ST DTP

● PUBLISHING PARTNER

Clik ST • 0753 682 988
£159.99

Excellent GEM-based pagemaker system, with multiple-on screen pages, impressive range of fonts and text sizes and facility to import different ST graphics formats. Also includes a range of drawing tools and variable magnification. Fast screen updates and high quality printer output

▲ Comprehensive and fast
▲ Excellent value

Value for money ★★★★★

● SIGNUM 2

Signa • 0252 31600
£184

Billed as a document processor, Signum allows text to be placed and adjusted to accuracies of upto 1/90th of an inch as well as imported graphics and technical fonts and symbols. Dot-matrix and laser printers are supported.

▲ Fast screen updates and response
▲ Compatible with Signa's scanners, digtisers and Mac emulators

▼ Price

Value for money ★★★

Also available:

● FLEET ST

£115

● TIMEWORKS

£99.95
see PC guide above for comments

ARCHIMEDES

● IMPRESSION

Computer Concepts • 0442 63933
£171

Designed specifically for RISCOS, *Impression* multitasks with other applications and supports data transfer between them. Capable of handling complex magazine layouts it comes with an outline font manager and typesetting quality printouts.

▲ Ease of import and editing
▲ Super-fast screen handling

Value for money ★★★★

● ACORN DTP

Acorn • 0223 245200
£149

Similar to the original *PageMaker* for the BBC B, Acorn's own package is based around frames into which a wide range of text styles, sizes and fonts can be combined with a range of imported graphics to produce high-quality printed output

▲ Demands a knowledge of DTP
▲ Fast screen handling

Value for money ★★★

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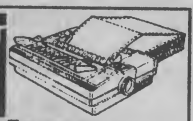

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ALL COMMODORE PC PRICES INCLUDE DELIVERY BUT EXCLUDE VAT at 15%

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AMSTRAD PCW

● STOP PRESS
Database • 051-357 2961
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A well-designed desktop publisher which doubles up as a graphics package. Besides being able to display data as graphs, pie charts etc, and manipulate draw objects, there's also a zoom feature, image superimpostion and a clip art library. You can print up to 108 pages in one go, choose from 14 different fonts and use up to 96 point type size.

▲ Great graphics handling
▲ Accurate positioning and layout

▼ Poor facility to undo mistakes.

Value for money ★★★★★

AMSTRAD CPC

● STOP PRESS
Database • 051-357 2961
£49.99

The DTP package for the CPC, *Stop Press* allows you to produce text of any size with a wide range of fonts and run it around illustrations you've drawn and edited. You can make fine adjustments, add patterned borders, create boxes, add shaded backgrounds and even fill circles with text.

▲ An impressive and comprehensive all-rounder
▲ Fantastic text and graphics handling

▼ You need a mouse

Value for money ★★★★★

COMMODORE 64

● STOP PRESS
£39.99
See notes above

BBC

● WAPPING EDITOR
Watford Electronics • 0923 37774
£69

Coming on a 64K ROM, this package has a sophisticated graphics module, pro-typesetting software, a word processor, font editor and a variety of printer dumps. It's mouse control allows you to create pages from A6 to A3, and print upto 150 characters across a A4 page. Multiple columns and pages are also supported.

▲ Very user friendly
▲ Extremely comprehensive range of features

Value for money ★★★★★

PC GRAPHICS

● PC PAINTBRUSH
Microsoft • 0734 500741
£145

Bitmapped painting package which offers a reasonable range of tools and functions to build impressive graphical displays. This program allows you to perform everything from simple sketches to complex and colourful designs.

▲ Microsoft is synonymous with quality
▲ Moderately easy to use

▼ Not cheap

Value for money ★★★

● DELUXE PAINT II
Electronic Arts • 0753 46465
£99.95

Comprehensive painting program also available for other machines which features functions such as dithering, lots of fills, stencils, in fact everything necessary for the budding silicon artist.

▲ Comprehensive and fully featured
▲ Gets the most from the limited PC display

Value for money ★★★★

● CORELDRAW!
CTRL ALT DELI • 0908 662759
£460

Advanced paint program with many functions including full traced bit-mapped graphics, lots of colours and fills and an easy to learn user interface. If you have a yen to tinker with paint and design but don't want to learn complex command sequences this is for you.

▲ Easy to learn and use
▲ Bit mapped graphics

Value for money ★

● VP GRAPHICS PLUS
Paperback Software • 0245 265017
£114.95

Not a paint package as such but rather a program which allows you the user to produce graphs and charts depicting a variety of information. You can draw histograms, pie charts, line graphs in fact everything necessary for business graphics display.

▲ Full range of charts available
▲ Easy to use

▼ Not for artists

Value for money ★★★

AMIGA GRAPHICS

● DELUXE PAINT III
Electronic Arts • 0753 46465
£79.95

The painting package for the Commodore Amiga. All possible functions including dithering, patterned fills, stencils, use of perspective, rotate and scaling effects as well as wrap fills, shadow painting using EHB and last but not least incredible animation making full use of all available tools.

▲ All possible painting functions
▲ Powerful animation

▼ A little daunting

Value for money ★★★★

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● PHOTON PAINT 2

Microillusions • 0480 49497
£79.95

This is the package for the novice. A very easy to use painting program that is both powerful yet simple to learn and exploit. There's full use of HAM modes, airbrush, texture mapping, variable blend control and animation. Recommended.

▲ Easy to use
▲ Many functions including animation

Value for money ★★★★

● PROFESSIONAL DRAW

HB Marketing • 0895 444433
£155

For those who want to create professional designs this is the package. Professional Draw has an easy to understand user interface featuring many icons which relate well to their respective operations making it easy to get the most from the program.

▲ Structured approach simplifies operations
▲ Reasonably priced for professional quality CAD

▼ Requires a little draughting knowledge to get the most from the program

Value for money ★★★

● DIGIPAINT V3.00

HB Marketing • 0895 444433
£60

The original and still one of the best. Fully-featured HAM painting package with sexy functions such as 4,096 colours on-screen and lots of special effects including shading, blending and tinting. What's more this latest version also features text, overscan and texture mapping and is £20 cheaper than earlier versions.

▲ Plenty of features for the money
▲ Special effects tools

▼ Not the most comprehensive paint package

Value for money ★★★★

ATARI ST GRAPHICS

● CYBER PAINT

Electric Distribution • 0480 496666
£69.95

Breath-taking bitmapped animation and graphics package from American magazine/software publisher Antic. This program features some incredible effects including tweening (changing one object to another a line at a time) and very powerful animation functions. Rivals the Amiga and is highly recommended.

▲ Very powerful animation
▲ Stunning effects
▲ Cheap

Value for money ★★★★★

● DEGAS ELITE

Electronic Arts • 0753 46546
£24.95

Like *Digipaint* for the Amiga, Degas *Elite* was one of the very first painting programs available for the Atari and it's still one of the best. You can have up to eight word screens at once cut and paste between any of them and there are plenty of useful and powerful functions such as zoom, block handling etc.

▲ 8 screens available
▲ Powerful block handling

▼ Lacking in features when compared to latest offerings

Value for money ★★★

● SPECTRUM 512

Electric Distribution • 0480 496666
£59.95

Painting package featuring (as its name suggests) 512 colours. The program is simple to use and effective. There's some very powerful functions too in the form of anti aliasing and gradient fill.

▲ Lots of colours
▲ Easy to use

▼ A little expensive

Value for money ★★

● ADVANCED ART STUDIO

Rainbird • 01-240 8838
£22.95

Aimed at those with a serious interest in producing quality art/graphics displays. The Advanced Art Studio has an enormous range of fills as well as comprehensive zoom and text handling complete this package.

▲ Lots of fills
▲ Powerful manipulation tools

Value for money ★★★★

ARCHIE GRAPHICS

● ATELIER

Minerva Software • 0392 437756
£99.95

The Acorn Archimedes with its immense computing power is the ideal machine for complex graphics manipulation and *Atelier* from Minerva Software exploits that power to the full. All tools and functions necessary for complex design and drawing.

▲ Powerful and comprehensive
▲ Easy to use

▼ A little expensive

Value for money ★★★

● PRO ARTISAN

Clares Micro Supplies • 0606 48511
£99.95

Professional release of the evergreen *Artisan* paint program. This package features 256 colours and 15 modes of operation.

▲ Lots of help screens

▼ Requires at least 1Mb of memory

Value for money ★★★★

PCW GRAPHICS

● MASTERPAINT/ MASTERSCAN

Database Software • 051-357 2961
£79.95

PCW and painting programs? Now it is a possibility with *MasterPaint* from Database Software. You can draw circles, ellipses, boxes, use fills cut and paste etc. There's comprehensive text manipulation and a variety of fonts. Only available with the Masterscan scanner

▲ Fully featured
▲ Exploits the power of your PCW

Value for money ★★★★

CPC GRAPHICS

● ADVANCED ART STUDIO

Rainbird • 01-240 8838
£22.95 disk only

Very similar to the Spectrum and Commodore 64 versions this popular painting package produces pixel appointed perfection and performs well!

▲ All the features necessary for pretty pictures
▲ Reasonably priced

Value for money ★★★★

SPECTRUM

● ADVANCED ART STUDIO

Rainbird • 01-240 8838
£22.95

Superior painting program for Spectrums equipped with 128K or above. Plenty of fills, colours and features such as zooming, windows and text handling. Reasonably priced and featured.

▲ Plenty of tools, colours and fills
▲ Easy to use

Value for money ★★★★

COMMODORE 64 GRAPHICS

● ADVANCED ART STUDIO

Rainbird • 01-240 8838
£22.95 disk only

Very similar to the Spectrum version but works with the basic Commodore 64 as well as the larger RAM memory machines. Fine range of features for a reasonable price.

▲ Full featured
▲ Plenty of colours
▲ Works with the 64K machines

Value for money ★★★★

DIGITISERS

● VIDI

ROMBO PRODUCTIONS • 0506 414631
(free demo disc available)
FOR PC £115
FOR AMIGA £99.95, £119.95 (colour version)
FOR ST £99.95
FOR PCW £99.95
FOR CPC £99.95

Grabs 16 shades of grey from videotape recorder or camera with software. the plug in card feature as a phono socket for the video signal input and controls for brightness and contrast. depending on the machine,the software allows real-time capture and display – on the Amiga it's four frames a second. If you have extra memory you can store images in RAM and play back animated sequences.

▲ Good low-cost performance
▲ Can control hardware from your own programs

▼ Performance dependent on host machine

Value for money ★★★★★

● THE DIGITISER

DATEL • 0782 744707
FOR AMIGA £89.99
FOR ST £79.99 (works in mono and colour)
FOR COMMODORE 64 £79.99

Plugging into a parallel port, the hardware frame grabs at 1/50th second and screen updates at one frame per second allowing the software to edit,cut and paste portions of the 16 grey scale picture along with special effects such as reversals and mirroring.

▲ Impressive features at the price
▲ Single, continuous or buffered display

Value for money ★★★★★

AMIGA

● DIGI VIEW GOLD

HB MARKETING • 0895 444433
£130

This minute digitiser plugs into the parallel port and comes with an accompanying colour wheel which attaches to a video camera for colour grabbing individual RGB signals. Grey scale digitising is also supported and both results are extremely impressive. Saturation, brightness and sharpness can all be controlled.

▲ Very impressive in HAM mode
▲ Features overscan, extra half-brite and line art support

▼ Needs 1Mb
▼ Lengthy scan times

Value for money ★★★★

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● VIDEON
Power Computing
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Good quality digitising on a par with *Digiview*. Software allows image enhancement, zooms, pixelisation and ability to transfer images onto surface of objects generated in art packages. Images of up to 4,096 colours can be captured and multiple images shown on screen simultaneously.

▲ Good quality digitisation
▲ Can digitise 4096 colours

▼ Slow scan rate
▼ No frame buffer

Value for money ★★★★

● DIGI-PIC
PRECISION SOFTWARE • 01-330 7166
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Upto 16 grey scale levels are supported with this impressive hardware which also includes a colour wheel for RGB scanning. Intuition pull-down menus afford easy operation and access to all functions leaving the main screen uncluttered. Software controls include quantisation,contrast, and edge

▲ Fast operation
▲ Supports up to 32 colours

▼ Low-res only

Value for money ★★★

ST

● TURBO-DIZER
SOFTWARE EXPRESS • 021-328 3585
£149

Camera, video recorder or TV pictures can be digitised via the plug-card as colour or grey scale images which can be treated for brightness and contrast. Images can be saved to disc as *Neochrome*, *Degas* or *Art Director* format files for subsequent manipulation. Only high- res pictures can be saved for DTP use.

▲ Good range of control for the price
▲ Excellent results in hi-res mode

▼ Slow scan time
▼ Animation only possible in lo-res

Value for money ★★★★

● SAM DIGITISER
START SYSTEMS • 0304 369364
£249.95

An excellent real-time frame grabber for capturing images in 16 colour lo-res format. Entire sequences can be saved – 10 on a 520, 24 on a1040, 52 on a Mega ST2 – and animations run at variable speed in forward or reverse.

▲ Blur-free, sharp frame capture ability
▲ Good animation and control

▼ Only operates in lo-res mode

Value for money ★★★

ARCHIMEDES

● REAL-TIME DIGITISER
WATFORD ELECTRONICS • 0923 37774
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Billed as the best digitiser for any micro, it provides a fast and flexible means of digitising. video camera, recorder and off-air pictures can not only be captured but treated and manipulated in real-time to a range of effects.

▲ High-quality image capture
▲ Fast processing and control

Value for money ★★★★★

● I/O PODULE
BRAINSOFT • 01-486 0321
£137

Part of a multiple input/output podule that incorporates a sound sampler, ROM sockets, RS232 and joystick interface, the I/O comes on a half height euro-card and can digitise up to 256 levels of grey. Colour is also provided, but can digitise in any graphic mode in any case. Up to two seconds can be scanned in MODE 12 or MODE 15 thus allowing animated sequences to be played back or incorporated into paint packages.

▲ Good level of sampling
▲ Part of a excellent suite

Value for money ★★★★★

PCW

● VIDEO DIGITISER
ELECTRIC STUDIO • 0462 675666
£99.95

Plugging into the expansion port and accepting either camera or recorder input. The resultant image can be used in any DTP package

▲ Auto contrast control

▼ Quality not as good as scan

Value for money ★★★

BBC

● BEEB VIDEO DIGITISER
WATFORD • 0923 37774
£114

Up to eight grey scales form pictures can be compressed, stored to disk and output to Epson-compatible printers. On-screen images can be treated as a normal graphic.

▲ Unit can be driven from BASIC

▼ Mono only

Value for money ★★★★

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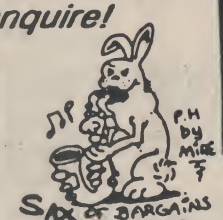

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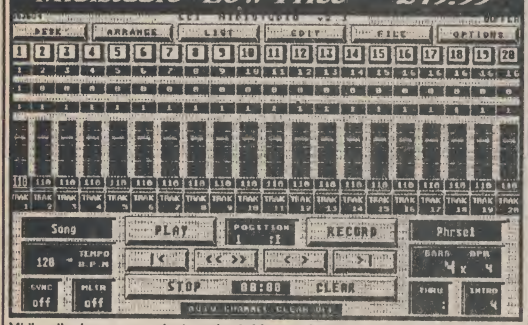

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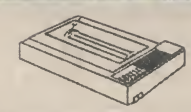

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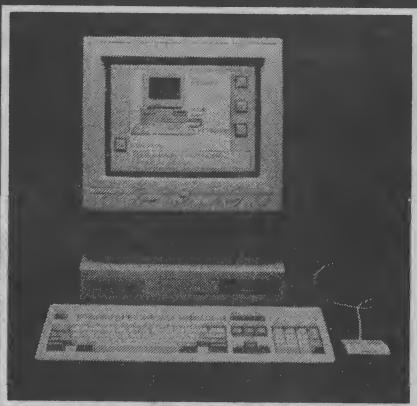

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MODEL	MON	COL	EGA
EURO PC	£349	£489	
EURO AT 512K S/D	£675	£805	£890
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EURO AT 1MB D/D	£851	£981	£1066
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PC10-D/D	£740	£896	£1013
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PC20 III-HD 640K	£631	£749	£868
PC30-286HD 640K	£935	£1052	£1130
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PC40-40MB 1 MB	£1291	£1462	
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AMSTRAD + Phone	PPC512D	£467
AMSTRAD + Phone	PPC640S	£445
AMSTRAD + Phone	PPC640D	£552
SHARP	4602	£863
SHARP	4641	£1463
SHARP	5541	£2330
SHARP	7221	£1699
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SUPERSPORT 286	20MB	£2237
SUPERSPORT 286	40MB	£2657
TURBOSPORT 386	40MB	£2797
AKHTER 286-3200	20MB	£1695
SCHNEIDER	PC7640	£1418
SAMSUNG S5200	32MB-AT	£1693
VICTOR V286P	30MB	£2499

AMSTRAD

MODEL	MON	COL	EGA
PCW8256	£310		
PCW8512	£395		
PCW9512	£424		
PC1512SD	£360	£437	
PC1512DD	£437	£513	
PC1640SD	£451	£536	£621
PC1640DD	£512	£597	£682
PC1640HD	£682	£768	£853

	Mono	Col	12"	14"
PC1286SD	£750	£835	£920	£1005
PC1386SD	£1180	£1265	£1351	£1436
PC2086SD +SOFT	£531	£617	£702	£787
PC2086DD + SOFT	£595	£680	£765	£851
PC2086HD + SOFT	£765	£851	£936	£1021
PC2286DD	£851	£936	£1021	£1106
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PC2386HD	£1702	£1787	£1872	£1957

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Super 16-TE S/D	£361	£361	£455	£511
Super 16-TE D/D	£430	£430	£524	£580
Super 16-TE HD30	£561	£561	£655	£711
286C 8/10MHZ 512K RAM				
286 S/D	£749	£749	£749	£859
286 HD30	£949	£949	£949	£1059
386SX 8/16 Mhz 1MB RAM				
386 S/D	£959	£959	£959	£1069
386 HD30	£1159	£1159	£1159	£1269
386C 8/20 Mhz No Wait States 1MB RAM VGA				
386C S/D	£1279	£1279	£1279	£1279
386C HD40	£1599	£1599	£1599	£1599

SAMSUNG

All the following Systems are without Monitors. Please refer to monitor box.

Model	Mono	CGA	EGA
PC/XT			
SPC3000/1 S/D	£405	£405	
SPC3000/2 D/D	£473	£474	
SPC3000/3 HD20	£677	£677	
AT80286 10Mhz			
MFC6000/1 S/D	£812	£812	
MFC6000/2 S/D	£1015	£1015	
SPC6500/3 HD20	£1151	£1151	
AT80286 12Mhz 1MB VGA			
SPC6512/1 S/D	£1015	£1015	
SPC6512/3 HD20	£1219	£1219	
SPC6512/4 HD40	£1354	£1354	
AT80386 20Mhz 2MB EGA			
S800 D/D	£1693	£1693	£1693

All Samsung Computers include 12 months on-site maintenance.

MITAC

Model	Mono	Col	EGA
88 512K	£586		
88 20MB HD	£790		£1102
1000L PS/2	£730	£930	VGA'S
1000L PS/2	£963	£1163	VGA'S
286SL HD20	£1030	£1209	£1332
286SL HD42	£1163	£1342	£1465
286V HD42	£1463	£1663	VGA'S
286V HD102	£1930	£2130	VGA'S
286VE HD42	£1596	£1796	VGA'S
286VE HD10	£2063	£2263	VGA'S
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386 HD102	£2796	£3130	VGA'S

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VICTOR

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VPCIIC D/D	£1099	£1299	£1549	£1599
VPCIIC HD30	£1499	£1699	£1949	£1999
V286C S/D	£999		£1299	£1499
V286C D/D	£1499		£1799	£1999
V286C HD30	£1999		£2299	£2499
V286C HD50	£2199		£2499	£2699
V286A HD30	£2099		£2549	£2599
V286A HD50	£2299		£2749	£2799
V286S HD50	£2499		£2949	£2999
V286S HD70	£2699		£3149	£3199
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MAKE	12" Mon	14" Mon	14" CGA	14" EGA	Mono VGA	Colour VGA	Multi Sync
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	7513 £77		9043 £261	9043 £261		9809 £374	
	7913 £81		9053 £296	9053 £296			
SAMSUNG	2573 £76	4573 £85		4531 £299	2611 £85	4531 £299	4551 £397
AMSTRAD	12MD £119		14CD £199		12HRCD £294	14HRCD £383	
AKHTER	ACL12G £60	ACL14G £85	VISION £199	ACL-3 £259	ACL-VM £110	ACL-V £289	ACL-M £355
HITACHI						480 AUTO £358	

Notice: All Samsung Monitors come with 12 Months on-site maintenance

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STAR LC15	180/45	£249
STAR FR10 ★	300/76	£289
STAR FR15 ★	300/56	£379
24 PIN DOT MATRIX		
STAR LC24-10	200/67	£189
STAR LC24-15	200/67	£319
STAR XB24-10 ★	240/80	£375
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KXP 1124	192/63	£220
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LASER PRINTERS		
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120D SER	120/25	£119
180E PAR	175/30	£123
180E SER	175/30	£149
MSP15E	160/40	£164
MSP40	240/40	£199
MSP45	240/40	£239
MSP50	300/60	£285
MSP55	300/60	£399
24 PIN DOT MATRIX		
HQP 40	200/65	£259
SWIFT 24	160/60	£245
LASER PRINTERS		
OVERTURE 106	6PPM	£930
OVERTURE 112	12PPM	£1289

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MAKE	SPEED	PRICE
LX400	180/30	£130
LX850	240/48	£178
FX850	264/54	£351
FX1050	240/48	£293
EX800	300/60	£402
EX1000	300/60	£530
DFX5000	533/400	£1087
LQ400	180/60	£189
LQ550	180/60	£255
LQ850	264/88	£394
LQ1050	264/88	£543
LQ860	290/88	£499
LQ1060	290/88	£639
LQ2550	400/133	£831
TLQ4800	250/83	£1437
SQ850	600/198	£575
SQ2550	600/198	£863

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DESK JET +		£519
PAINT JET		£644
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LASER JET IIP	4PPM	£879
LASER JET II	8PPM	£1248
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DM282	240/40	£216
DM282S	240/40	£245
DM292S 136 col	240/40	£307
DM250	240/60	£402
DM250L 136 col	240/60	£458
DM400 136 col	400/100	£867
DM704 136 col	400/100	£1053
DM309	360/66	£269
DM309L 136 col	360/66	£356
LASER PRINTERS		
PG 306 ★	6PPM	£899
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MODEL	SPEED	PRICE
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CANON IX-31F Scanner Int/face		£113
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MT905	6PPM	£889
SHARP JX-9300	6PPM	£1063
KYOCERA F1000	10PPM	£1459
KYOCERA F1200	10PPM	£2369
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KYOCERA P2000	10PPM	£3969
BROTHER HL-8e	8PPM	£1369
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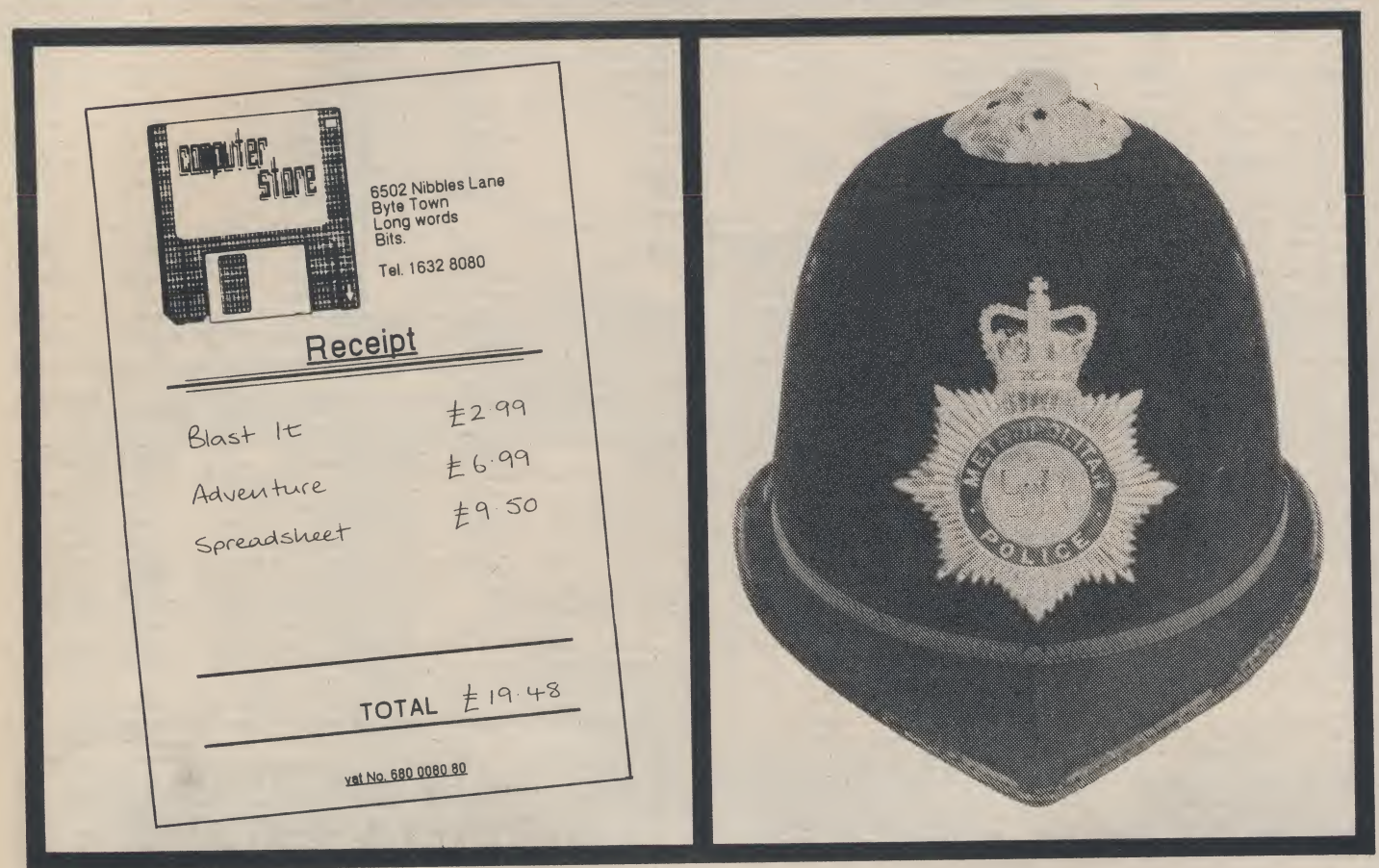

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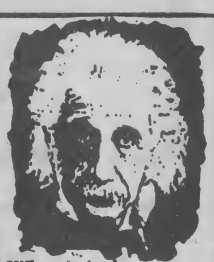

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SUPERCHARGER

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The Atari ST has a large following and its popularity is deserved. Many software houses support the machine with games that are second to none and business software second only to one. That 'one' is the IBM PC and its many clones. The PC is the undisputed leader when it comes to business and serious computing, because the PC has the biggest user base of any micro.

However the ST, with the Motorola 68000 CPU at its heart and an internal architecture capable of addressing many more megabytes of memory than the PC, is far more suited to the applications in use on Big Blue's baby. Why not, thought several electronics companies, create an emulator for the ST that would enable it to run PC software, yet which would ensure that the computer remained an ST at heart? In effect, the best of both worlds. Many such emulators have appeared over the years, some good, as with *PC Ditto* (although software-based emulators are incredibly slow), some not so good. The latest of them is SuperCharger, a plug-in hardware emulator that claims phenomenal power and speed and yet remains reasonably priced – or so the advertising speil goes. How good is it?

• *The SuperCharger's small 'footprint' means that it takes up very little desk space. It draws power from the ST's mouse socket.*

TRANSFORM YOUR ST

You don't have to buy a PC to use all that lovely PC business software – plug in an emulator to your ST and save yourself a fortune. Jerry Glenwright switched on the SuperCharger

The most striking thing about SuperCharger is that unike many of its rival emulators, the device remains outside the computer, attaching to the ST via the DMA port. Housed in a neat little plastic case which stands upright, freeing space on your desktop, the front panel sports a couple of LED indicators and a reset switch, and the rear a DMA through port. This through port enables you to use SuperCharger and connect peripherals such as a hard drive or laser printer to your computer.

POWER SUPPLY

In order to receive power, SuperCharger is connected to the ST's mouse port via a splitter cable. You can still plug in the mouse and use it as normal, but SuperCharger is also connected, taking its power from the 5V terminal in the port. This is rather a neat solution and means that you don't have to have yet another three-pin plug vying for space at the electricity outlet.

Switching the SuperCharger on was tricky with our review version. As the SuperCharger takes power from the ST, the Atari won't boot properly if it is working – so you have to hold the reset button in during the boot. The configuration programs are in German and the software didn't always work with our machine. Condor says these problems will be sorted out by the time the SuperCharger hits the shops, and an auto-booting disk will automatically set the emulator going. When it's running you're prompted for an MS-DOS disk and then, hey presto! Your ST is a PC.

Display quality is good. SuperCharger conforms to the CGA and MDA display standards and consequently can run most PC software – both games and business. However, it will not run DTP and graphics software properly – they require the higher-resolution EGA, VGA or Hercules standards.

You can use the emulator with the Atari colour monitor or the SM124 monochrome monitor if you have one. Obviously games are far more fun in colour, but most serious software is restricted to a single colour, or at best two or three, and so will be fine on the SM124.

MOUSE TRAPPED

After the ST and Apple Macintosh proved how popular the windows, icons and mouse interface could be, PC software houses decided to get in on the act. Indeed you can buy a version of GEM – the ST's operating system – for the PC. Microsoft markets a mouse which has become the *de facto* standard for PC rodents, and lots of software makes provision for its use. So that you may access this software, the SuperCharger converts the ST's mouse so that it behaves just like a Microsoft device. There's no degradation in performance and all software that I tried it with worked fine.

SuperCharger is equipped with its own RAM – it doesn't use any of the ST's memory. This enables you to switch from PC mode to ST via a hot key combination, run an ST program, then return to PC mode without quitting the PC program currently running. Whatever the PC was doing will be frozen at the point of switching over, and will resume when you return. This feature is very useful, enabling you to transfer files without fuss.

If you want to perform complex and processor-intensive operations, SuperCharger is socketed for use with an 8087 maths co-processor. This speeds up calculations enormously and can increase productivity for spreadsheet and database users by leaps and bounds.

I tried SuperCharger with a range of widely-used serious software such as *WordStar*, Lotus *1-2-3*, *dBase*, and *SuperCalc* and all worked without the slightest hiccup. A common criticism of emulators is that it's unwise to trust them with valuable data from a spreadsheet or database in case the dreaded crash occurs and you're left without any access to your information. SuperCharger performs totally reliably. Fast and powerful, using it is exactly like having a standard PC clone on your desk – I say clone because the now-rusting original IBM PC couldn't run as fast as SuperCharger.

And if you want to play PC games, all those I tried worked perfectly. *Kings of the Beach*, *Colony* and several flight simulators including the ultimate test of compatibility for any clone or emulator, SubLogic's *Flight Simulator II*, all ran quite happily.

VERDICT

You may be happy with your ST, and it is a very good machine, but sometimes there's just no substitute for access to a particular PC package. After all, some of the foremost software houses in the world write for the machine, so there is some good stuff around.

Connect SuperCharger to your ST and you have a fast and robust PC clone under your typing fingers. At a touch below £300, you'll have the best of both worlds, and SuperCharger is certainly the best PC emulator on the market at the moment.■

TESTING, TESTING

SuperCharger was tested with a large number of popular PC software packages to determine its compatibility. Here is just a small cross section of what can be used with this emulator:

WordStar (several versions), Lotus *1-2-3*, *dBase IV*, *SuperCalc*, *WordPerfect*, *Microsoft Word*, Windows, *688 Attack Sub*, *Flight Simulator II*, *Colony*, *Kings of the Beach*, *Leisure Suit Larry*. And lots of public domain software such as *Arc*, *PKXArc*, *SpeedFile*, *Handy PC* etc...

TECH SPEC

- V30 central processor running at 8MHz
- CGA and MDA display standards supported
- 512K internal RAM expandable to 1Mb
- Uses Atari mouse as a PC mouse
- DMA through port
- Socketed for use with 8087 maths co-processor
- Works with both colour and monochrome monitors
- Supports Atari parallel port
- Supports Windows

TECH TIPS

Personal computer problems? Express's Agony column has the answer. Write in strictest confidence to Uncle Techtip. The best tips win a freebie – so don't forget to tell us your address and machine

Gakken gear wheel

Richard Baynes enquired in Tech Tips (*Express* 56) about his Gakken 2000 printer. I know where I can get my grubby paws on the nylon gear wheel required for his machine. If he sends me the wheel I will go to my stockist and get him a replacement. Of course I will require his address before I send it.

His machine is still kicking around as I have the same model. I suggest that when he sets his printer to work with a word processor that he sets it to a Diablo 630 as this gives better output than in normal Qume mode.

Chris Pelling, 84 Heathcote Drive, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 1ND.

Thanks for the tips Chris.

DTP upgrade

I currently own a Commodore 64C, previously a Commodore 16 and also a Sinclair ZX81 with the membrane keyboard and wobbling RAM pack. I wanted a computer mainly for producing posters and pages from desktop publishing packages and letters with word processors, using my Citizen 120D printer. I thought of upgrading to the Commodore Amiga, Atari ST or even the BBC. What do you recommend?

Would my Citizen be of use or would it be too weak for use with one of the 16-bit computers?

Finally, is there any public domain software on offer for the C64? I am interested mainly in disk-based programs.

Bryan Stephenson, Chesterfield, Derbyshire

By BBC I presume you mean the Archimedes. All are excellent computers, with super sound, good graphics and more speed than you can shake a stick at. Of the three, I would plump for the Amiga, taking into account your intended purposes. There's a wealth of quality graphics software around which will be perfect for producing posters and other eye-catching pieces of art work.

Your printer will work fine with these more powerful machines, but for producing artwork you might want to look at a more expensive 24-pin model – the increase in quality is marked.

Yes you can get public domain software on disk for the Commodore 64. Contact Wicked PD on 0268 590571. The company runs a public domain club especially for the C64. After paying a small fee to join, you're entitled to receive public domain disks for a couple of pounds each.

A500 plus 1,500

There is a way to get the Commodore A500 to take A2000 expansion cards.

Pacific Peripherals & Argonaut Hardware produce a system for the machine which gives the humble little Amiga A500 two 100-pin slots. It costs around £230 and you can find the people who sell it on 01-208 0072.

Ahmed Alam, Old Trafford, Manchester.

Printer choice

I have an Atari 1040 STF which I use mainly for word processing, desktop publishing and the odd bit of game playing. I find that it is an excellent machine for this.

I would like to start transferring word processor files from the office PC to my Atari ST. The PC uses the same 3.5-inch disks as the the ST, so I wondered whether the ST could read them directly. Could I use .IFF or ASCII files? Or do I have to get *PC Ditto* to transfer data?

Also I'm shopping around for a good 24-pin printer and have narrowed down the choice to the NEC P2200, the Panasonic KXP1124, the Citizen Swift 24 and the Star LC24-10. There are a number of points you answer for me regarding these:

1. Can one get a colour upgrade for the Star?

2. Why is the Star £100 cheaper than the rest?

3. Are all the printers directly compatible with the ST?

I am also considering the HP Thinkjet. Is the output quality as good as the Deskjet? Is it as good as the 24-pin printers? Any problems with compatibility?

Is the NEC P2200XE expected to arrive in this country soon from the United States?

Paul Kenward, Prestwood, Bucks.

The PC and ST use almost exactly the same disk format and you can indeed transfer files of any type between the two without problems. However, I say almost because unlike GEM on the ST, DOS writes an extra byte or two to the disk to identify its type. That is, when you insert a disk into a PC drive, DOS examines this byte to determine whether the disk is 3.5-inch or 5.25-inch, its density etc. Format disks on the PC and you can read the resulting disks on both machines. *PC Ditto* is a complete PC emulator for the Atari ST that enables that machine to run PC software, you don't need it to transfer files. ASCII files will transfer with no problems, but whether or not you can use PC .IFF files will depend on your ST software – try it and see.

If you want the colour version of the Star printer, you must buy that version initially. You can't upgrade the mono printer at a later date. The Star is cheaper because simply because Star uses the cunning ploy of pricing its equipment reasonably in order to attract prospective buyers.

All the 24-pin printers you mention are directly compatible with the ST – just plug in and go.

Output quality from the new Hewlett Packard Thinkjet printer is of a very high standard and probably on par with the Deskjet. It is certainly as good as the 24-pin printers and there are no compatibility problems with the ST.

The NEC P2200XE is expected any time now, hopefully before Christmas (but don't hold your breath).

ROM revision

Recently I upgraded my Commodore Amiga to a Kickstart 1.3 ROM which was supplied from a reputable dealer. Now occasionally when I boot my Amiga from cold, the drive light comes on, waits to reach time out then goes off, and then comes on again and stays on permanently. When I bought the ROM the supplier told me it was a latest revision ROM and I just can't imagine this being a chip fault as it only seems to do it occasionally.

If the Amiga is left in a safe place, is it always necessary to park the drive heads? Is it safe to park the heads from the icon on the A590? I use the icon from a floppy. Is it safe to switch on my Amiga leaving the power off on the hard drive, if I do not wish to use it?

Marc Burgess, Winsford, Cheshire.

Don't worry about the drive light coming on. To be perfectly honest I have no idea what it might be (probably some foible of the new version of the operating system), but if it isn't stopping you from computing then forget it.

You don't need to park the heads on the hard drive if it is in a place where it is unlikely to get knocked. The hard drive mechanism is a robust animal nowadays and as long as you don't attempt to move the device while it is in operation, it shouldn't come to any harm.

You can park the heads using a program stored on the hard drive itself perfectly safely, and you don't need to switch on the hard disk if you don't want to use it but still want to make use of your computer. The Amiga will simply boot up from floppy as though the hard drive had never existed and no harm will be done.

Comms embarrassment of a computer studies teacher

I have a really embarrassing computer-related problem! I teach computer studies, yet I can't seem to log on to my recently-acquired account with Prestel.

I have a GEC Datachat 1223 modem and the shareware program *Procomm*. Can I log on to my Prestel account with this comms stuff and my Opus PCIII Turbo? If so, what parameters am I required to supply to *Procomm*? If you can help, I'll be able to hide my embarrassing blushes...

Embarrassed computer studies teacher.

To access Prestel you need to use the modem and software on 1200/75 baud. This can cause problems if either or both of these don't support this 'split' baud rate. If your modem doesn't use split rates then whatever communications software you use will fail to work. If the modem does, then perhaps *Procomm* may not. A lot of comms software originates in the United States where phone charges are cheaper and comms is far more popular. Unfortunately for UK users of this shareware, the 1200/75 split baud rate is peculiar to the UK, and consequently little American software supports it.

Although the software marketed by Prestel is expensive, it might save a lot of time and frustration if you were to use it.

If both the modem and the software support split baud rates then I'd advise you to call Prestel customer help line . New subscribers occasionally have problems with passwords.

Atari Amiga

Please could you advise me on Atari ST emulators for the Commodore Amiga. I would like to be able to play most ST games and use the utilities and serious software available for this machine. Is this possible, or are these emulators a joke?
Timo Newton-Syms, Chalfont, Bucks.

No, it's not possible. There are no ST emulators for the Commodore Amiga. A couple of years ago there was a spate of claims of Amiga emulators for the ST and vice-versa, and they're still advertised in PD catalogues, but I've yet to see one that works.

Stick to playing games on your Amiga. It has groovy graphics and sexy sound and is unbeaten as a game playing machine.

P500 problems

I am writing to appeal for help through your pages. A friend of mine has a West German-made Commodore P500 which has a corrupt kernel file '500/901234-02'. It also requires two BASIC ROMs '500/901236 BASIC low 128K' and '500/901235 BASIC high 128K'.

Is this a scrap piece of hardware or can spares be obtained? I am informed that there was a modification to allow a data recorder to be connected through one of the ports. The makers themselves don't know anything about the machine and at an original price of £695 + VAT, my friend tells me that it has had hardly any use.
Paul Simpson, 23 Caxton Street, Sunnyhill, Derby DE3 7RB.

I don't know of anyone in the UK who is still supplying parts for this old dinosaur. But there are a lot of Techtippers out there who have some very strange hardware. Sit back and wait for the flood of mail offering you spares and software.

Cat walk

I am the proud possessor of an Atari Mega 4 and the Amstrad 1640DD, EGA, Hercules, MDA and CGA compatible (whatever that might be!). I intend to purchase the Atari Megafile 30 hard disk drive. Will I be able to connect this to the Amstrad 1640?

Amstrad's manual states: "Set up some special commands in MS-DOS's `CONFIG.SYS` file if the new drive is in any way non-standard". Is the Atari Megafile 30 non-standard?

Winter is now upon us, and Clarkie the cat and I have decided that long walks in the garden while *Cyber Sculpt* is loading and saving are just not on, hence the decision to get the drive.
Ron Wood (Sculptor), Truro, Cornwall.

The drive mechanism itself is a standard off-the-shelf device that can be connected to any computer which supports PC-compatible hard drives. However, in order that the Atari ST can make use of this drive a special interface known as a SCSI (pronounced 'scuzzy') has to be connected between the two.

You can connect the Amstrad 1640 to the drive, but it means opening the Megafile's case and by-passing the interface – not a task for the non-technical. It's possible, but perhaps you ought to bang together a few bits of wood, flog them to an unsuspecting – but culturally gullible – public and buy a cheap, possibly second-hand, drive intended for use with PC clones. And as for Clarkie...

Back to BASICs

I have HiSoft's Power BASIC which I use with my Atari ST. I like this program very much and I am able to write reasonable programs with it. However, because my BASIC knowledge is limited, I wondered if you could recommend a book which explains the fundamentals of the BASIC language and the key words. I would like to understand what things do and why, and to improve my programming abilities and skills.
Jan Lord, Selby, North Yorks.

One of the best explanations of the BASIC language that I've ever seen was the manual which accompanied the Sinclair ZX81 computer. This was one of the best manuals ever to be packaged with a computer, and is certainly worth trying to obtain.

Failing that, get a copy of *Structured BASIC and Beyond* by Dr Wayne Amesbury published by Computer Science Press and priced £8.95 (ISBN 0-914894-16-1). This book provides a clear and detailed overview of the BASIC language, including such niceties as procedures and recursion, and takes novice programmers to the dizzy heights of the expert quickly and easily.

Switch back

I would like to connect two modems to the serial port of my Atari 1040 STFM as I cannot afford a single modem which will cope with all the baud rates I require. I was wondering if this was possible using a switch box. If so, could you please give me details on which one I should use, the price, and where I could purchase such a beast? My High Street is bereft of suitable devices, please help.
Paul Smith, Shirecliffe, Sheffield.

Yes, you can use a switch box to connect two serial devices to an Atari ST. Pop along to your local W. H. Smiths and buy a copy of the Maplin catalogue (priced around £2). You may know, if you're a regular reader of this column, that Maplin is a tried and trusted electronics mail order supplier. The Dataswitch 1 to 2 is suitable for your purposes and costs £30.95. If you can't get the catalogue, you can order direct by calling Maplin on 01-748 0926.

PC owners can use a similar switching box to be able to have a serial printer, like a LaserWriter, or modem plugged in when they have a MicroSoft mouse, or some such serial rodent, using up their only COM port.■

The secrets of sound sampling and MIDI music revealed

I have a few questions about the Atari ST.
1. What is the difference between MIDI and sampling?
2. What equipment would I need for either operation?
3. How much would it cost?
4. Are there any good books to help me?
5. Would I be violating copyright by using pop tunes in my programs?
6. Is there any way of cutting down on the number of plugs I'm using with my computer, monitor, printer and external drive. I think my sockets might be a bit overloaded.
Gaz Kelly, Portsmouth, Hants.

• Link a synthesiser to an ST through the MIDI ports, then you can record the music you play and control the keyboard from the computer

1. MIDI is an acronym standing for Musical Instruments Digital Interface and is, as its name suggests, an interface to enable you to connect and program a suitable instrument such as a synthesiser to your computer. The musical world is awash with such MIDI-compatible instruments at the moment covering everything from electronic saxophones to digital guitars.

Sampling is the process of capturing a small amount of sound, be it from a record, musical instrument, dog bark, paper and comb player etc., storing this captured sample (hence the name) in digital form within your computer, then playing it, altering the pitch and duration etc. All the devices necessary for sampling are available for the ST.

2. For MIDI you need to buy an instrument equipped with the necessary interface. Your Atari ST is already complete with MIDI port. A suitable cable is also necessary to connect the two devices together, and, of course, you need to buy some software to drive the interface.

To capture digital sound samples you need one of the many samplers on the market such as that produced by Mandarin software, the software company responsible for the *STOS* games programming package. Although *STOS* Maestro Plus– as the sampler is known – is intended for use with the other *STOS* products, you can use it as a stand-alone device.

3. You can expect to pay several hundred pounds for a MIDI instrument. Poor quality specimens are available for around £150, but much depends upon what it is you want to achieve and which instrument you would like to play. A cable would cost about a fiver and the software between £30 and £60.

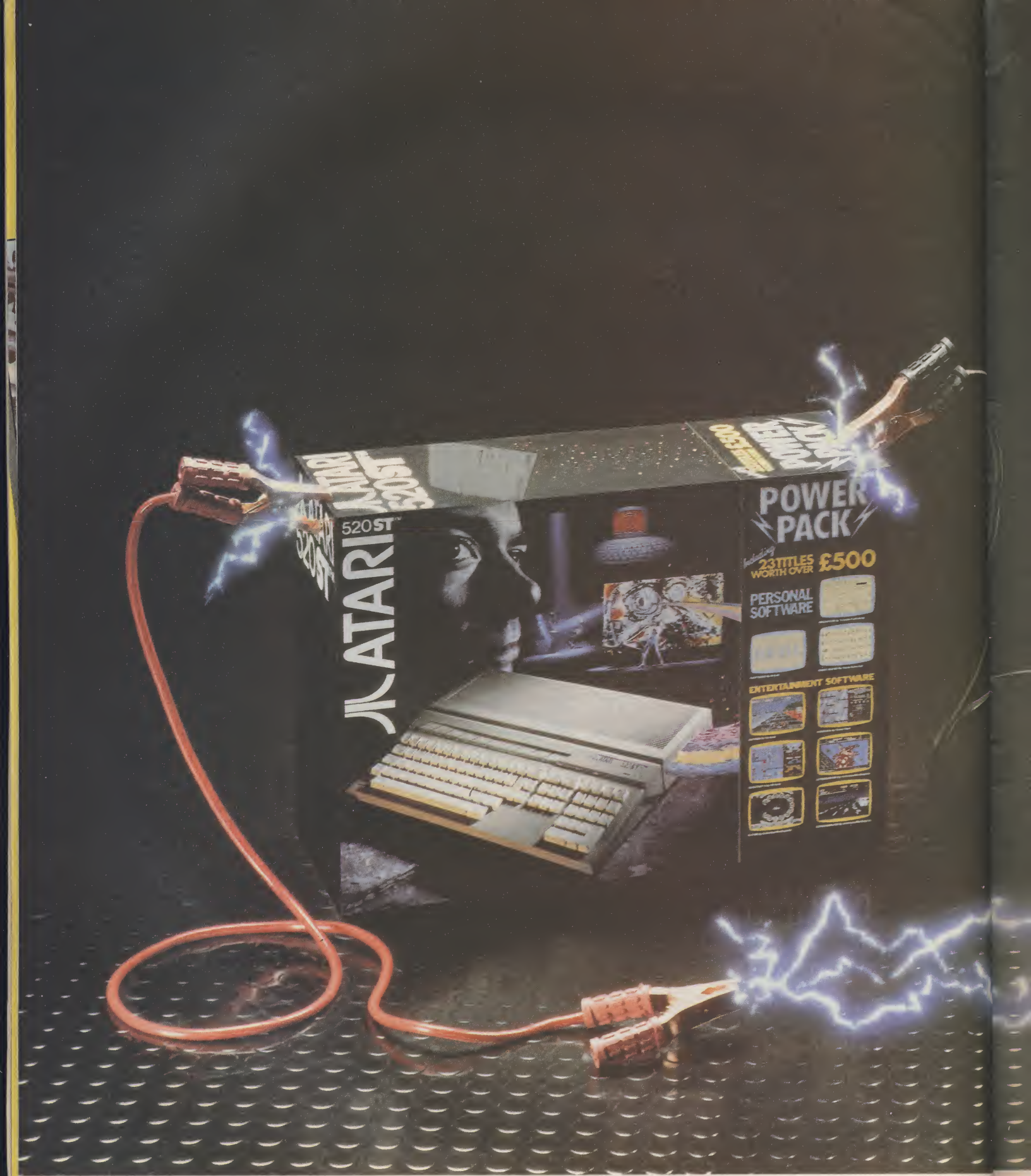
STOS Maestro Plus costs £69.95. There are other slightly cheaper and several far more expensive devices, but Maestro performs well and offers good value for money. The necessary software is included with the sampler.

4. For adventures in MIDI you might like to obtain a copy of *Discovering MIDI*, priced £9.95 and published by Computer Associates. It is an excellent introduction to the subject.

Samplers come with full documentation and don't really need third party texts detailing their operation.

5. Yes. There are a few public domain demos featuring sounds lifted from pop records, which the record companies don't think are worth chasing up for royalties, but if you include sampled sounds from a record in a game which you intend to sell you would need to seek permission from the record label concerned. Unless you are a respected industry figure (which you obviously are not), or have money to throw away, it is unlikely that you would receive that permission. However, there's no harm in trying – it might be rather fun to see what reaction you get.

6. The eternal computer problem. Each new peripheral requires yet another power outlet. Computers and their peripherals don't draw much current from the mains (remembering, of course, from school physics lessons that it is the current and not the voltage which is important here), so you can attach lots of devices without overloading a power point – although it is still not a very good idea.



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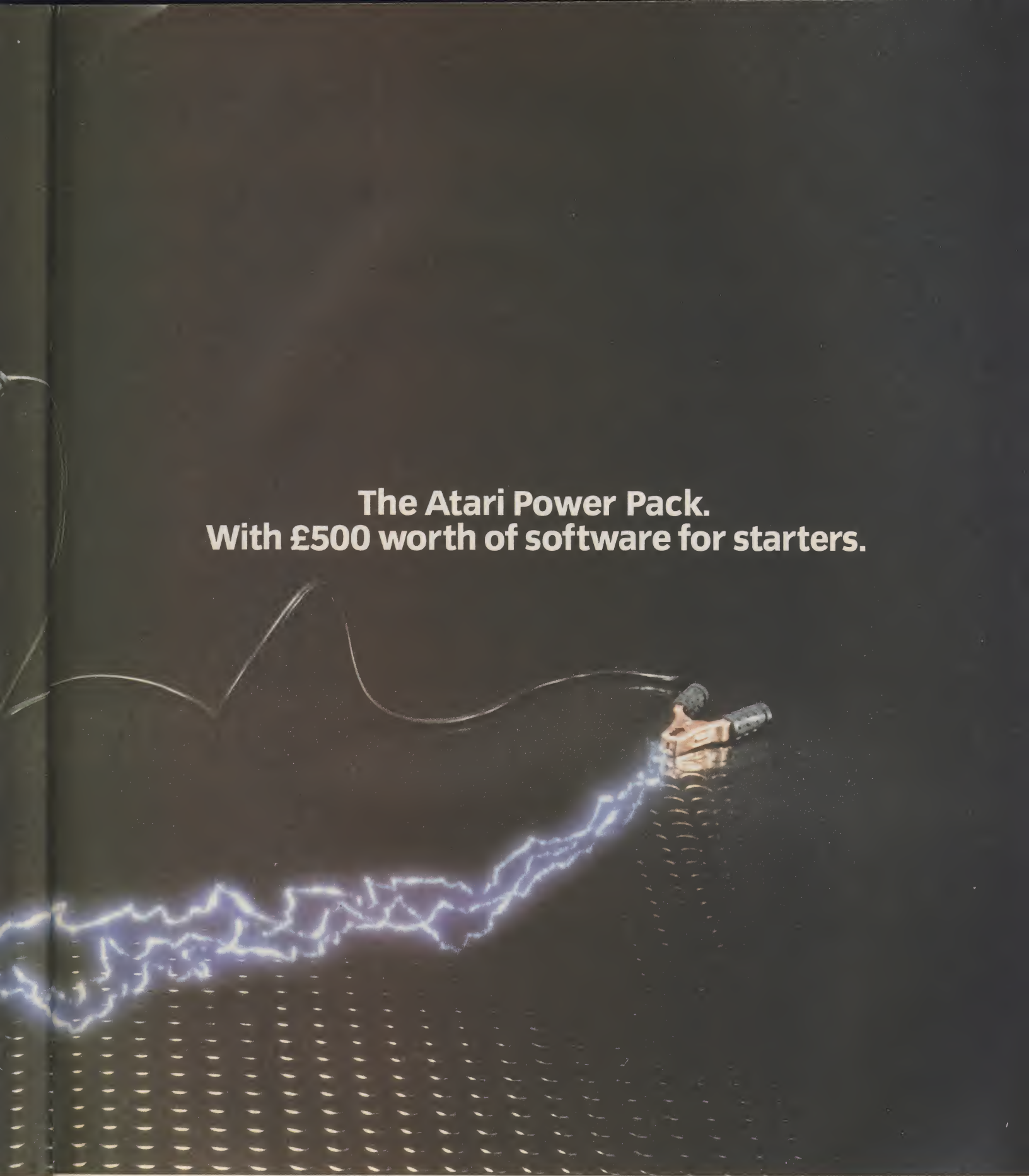

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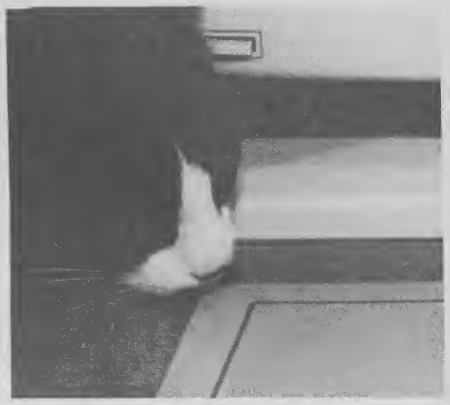

• A mouse mat makes deft strokes of the rodent a pleasure. If the cat doesn't get it first try Thingi on 051-647 8981 for a device to ease your mouse problems.

CHEAP AND CHEERFUL

Looking for a stocking filler? David O'Hare rounds up a few hardware oddities that won't break the bank...

By now you've probably made out your Christmas list. But somehow I doubt you'll be getting the Acorn Archimedes A310, Apple Macintosh IIcx or Amiga B2000 you put at the top of it – and you probably won't be buying many of those for your friends either.

So here are a few suggestions of widgets, gadgets and add-ons, all under a tenner, that you can ask your nearest and dearest to buy you – or get for your computer-owning friends and relatives – as a last-minute additions to the Christmas stocking.

SLIP A DISK

Disks are a good cheap stocking filler – anything down to 25p each for 5.25-inch, 75p for 3.5-inch, and £1.90 for 3-inch – but they're a bit boring. Disk accessories you'll wonder how you managed without include disk labels (1,000 for under a tenner) and disk boxes – great for tidying up unsightly desks!

Lockable boxes cost as little as £2.50 for one that holds ten 3.5-inch disks up to £6.75 for a hundred-disk 5.25-inch model, both plus £2 p&p from Westoning on 0836 775060. Scour the mail order ads in *Express* for the best deals.

TIE A YELLOW RIBBON

If you use a printer a lot – for letters, listings, desktop publications or whatever – a really useful money-saver is a ribbon refresher. It's basically an aerosol ink spray; when your print begins to fade you hack open your printer ribbon, spray it for between 10 and 20 seconds, and replace the top. Print comes out sharp and black again and it saves you buying another ribbon. Refreshers do about 50 ribbons and cost around £9, though many mail order outfits sell them them for under £7.

An offbeat alternative for the printer user is a coloured ribbon. Various hues are available from the mail order outfits enabling you to print out in all colours of the rainbow (but avoid brown, which looks awful!) Check the type of printer as different ribbons are needed for different machines. They cost about the same price as a normal ribbon – a fiver or so.

Printer stands are a good thing to buy for anyone with a cluttered desk. For £6 upwards – check the mail order ads again – you get a wire frame that keeps your printer and paper neatly stacked up.

MICE TO SEE YOU

Mouse users – which should include all the 16-bitters out there – can get a range of widgets including mouse holders, to hang up the device when it's not in use, mouse cleaning kits, and mouse mats.

While a copy of *New Computer Express* probably makes the best mouse mat and only costs 58p, you can get proper mats for as little as £3, and they stop the thing getting gunged up with muck from the desktop.

Undoubtedly the most bizarre mouse add-on was the one demonstrated at the last PC Show by Terra. The Furry Mouse House is a fluffy cover that makes your mouse look like a real rodent! Unfortunately no-one seems to know of Terra's phone number or the price of the article, but if you do, let us know!

Joysticks aren't expensive, and with the growing number of games that can use two joysticks, such as Anco's football sim *Kick Off*, you can play against a friend on the computer. Mail order houses will sell you one for as little as £6 and you can probably find one in your local computer shop for well under a tenner.

BOOK WORM

Books make a good, useful and inexpensive present and any large bookshop will have dozens of titles for any major machine. All the languages such as BASIC, C, Pascal and so on are covered, and every major piece of software has an 'alternative manual' somewhere. Most brands of micro have hints and tips books on sale covering all the little niggles of computer ownership.

PAPER ROUND

Computer paper is another useful thing to have, and you can get away from boring old white by buying coloured paper. Environmentally-conscious types can buy a wide range of recycled stuff from any stationers. One company specialising in recycled computer products is Traidcraft, Kingsway, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear NE11 0NE.

WONDER WIDGETS

If you do a lot of copy typing – listings for pokes from a magazine, perhaps, or material for your local newsletter typed onto disk from handwritten contributions – you could use a copy holder. This is a bracket that sticks onto your monitor with Velcro and holds the page you're typing from so that you can read it and look at your monitor almost at the same time, without having to keep switching back and forward. There's reckoned to be a market worth £13 million in the things, expanding at 25 per cent a year!

The most famous copy holder is probably the Thingi, and the Thingi 2 is available from Little Office for £7.95 on 051-666 1190.

Drive cleaners are supposed to minimise the chance of corrupting disks by keeping dust and dirt off the drive head. They are probably needed less than their counterparts in the audio cassette world, but in case you think it's for you, you can get one from Dunning on 0202 431762 for around £3 depending on the size of your drive.

AMAZING BUT TRUE

Of course, some things are just plain silly – like the disk-shaped condoms that one company was demonstrating at the recent Comdex show in America. Maybe not the sort of thing to ask for from your ageing aunt or uncle – especially as they're not yet available in this country.

Or how about 'Computer Critters', another product on show there, which consists of a stick-on set of furry legs, tail and head, and is supposed to make your monitor into a cuddly animal?

But America doesn't have the monopoly on the odd-balls. How about the torch with the light on the end of a fibre optic thread which you can put inside your disk drive to see what's going on in there? Streamside Research on 2 Rosary Drive, Bridgewater, Somerset will sell you one for around £2.

Hopefully next year will see more formats have the equivalent of the Smack a Mac. This Apple Macintosh shaped bean-bag, now available in the UK, gives you chance to vent your frustration when your Mac crashes by throwing it around the room. Maybe the next version will be the Amiga...

A visit to your local computer shop could solve most of your Christmas stocking problems – Merry Christmas! ■

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WOULD YOU BUY A COMPUTER FROM THIS MAN?

Thousands of you already have, and thousands more will. He's Barry Young, Amstrad's UK managing director and he's steering the firm through some troubled times. Colin Campbell chatted to him about PCs, PCWs, Spectrums, CPCs, STs, Amigas, depression, Beastie Boys, mints and, of course, Alan Sugar

Barry Young is tired. He's spent the day in dozens of meetings, he's sorted out hundreds of problems, and he's dodged London's psychopathic drivers in order to get to a press interview in Leicester Square. And he's extremely unhappy with the public conception of Amstrad being a bunch of cynical money grabbers. It's time to set the record straight. After a nice cup of tea he's ready to be 'honest and open'.

What do you do for a living?
Hopefully I sell as much product as possible to every customer that we can service. I implement marketing policy, customer services, warehousing, UK distribution, heads of departments, management meetings, more meetings, lots of meetings...

What's the most difficult part of what you do?
If I'm honest I suppose it's absorbing all that's happening at the moment. With a company this size there's so much to absorb, and, as you can imagine, with so many products there's a lot to know. We're running six months ahead, so it's difficult. Something happens which changes everything, and that doesn't make things easy.

Amstrad hasn't had a brilliant year, and it has come in for a lot of stick from the press. What's your feeling about that?
It's been going on for more than a year now. First we had the chip shortage, which was very frustrating for everyone. We had the computers sold but we couldn't supply them. There's nothing worse for someone in business – everything is geared up but you're not able to supply, and people are screaming at you from all quarters.

Then we had the situation where stock did become available and we had the hard disk problem on the PC2000 series which had to be addressed. And then the profit problems were announced and that had an effect on people's morale in the company.

All in all, people have taken a bit of a battering. Now we're getting things moving again and morale is higher. We're now getting an awful lot of support and loyalty, that pleases me.

We're seeing people working long hours again because they want to. They're determined and enthusiastic.

When you all come into the office after a poor profit announcement and read all about it in the press, is there a black cloud over everybody?
Yes. As a high profile company whatever we do gets into the press, and the press seem to love to capitalise on the bad news. It affects everyone

We wouldn't be human beings otherwise. I go home praying that no-one will mention it and say "Have you looked in today's papers?". But they do, and all I can do is get depressed all over again.

The City seems to give you a hard time as well. Why?
Yes, that's probably true. Alan Sugar has always been a very truthful man and he doesn't try to hide anything. He's not the sort of guy who goes out on fancy lunches in the City. He works from 8.30 in the morning until 6.30 in the evening. If a City analyst calls him up he'll tell the truth – and often that causes us a few problems.

Is he trying to be more cautious now?
No, I would hope not. The success of the company is the man. That personality is part of him as a human being and to stop that might stop him being so creative in his thoughts. I don't think he should change just because the City doesn't like him.

Do you have a chuckle when you about the 'Brentwood Beastie Boys'?
No. Frankly, it means nothing to me. The only thing that upsets me is when something is printed which isn't true. There are wrong interpretations of various situations and we get tagged with something which isn't true.

People should just talk to our customers – they are the important ones. They don't turn round and call us Beastie Boys.

We're tough to deal with but no tougher than, say, IBM. It's just a very busy company with a real sense of urgency. If we want something done we don't leave it until next week, we'll take the decision now and we'll sit down until it's all sorted out.

Ninety-five per cent of the time we'll get it right, but because decisions are taken quickly we'll get it wrong five per cent of the time. The benefits of taking a fast decision far outweigh the disadvantages.

Maybe that's why people who see us get the impression that we haven't got time. We haven't got time because we're too busy – we're running a business.

What about really important decision such as launching a new machine?
We have a separate division called the Group area. They'll talk to all subsidiaries such as the UK and France about a new product. Each country will be given a menu of specifications and you select which one you want for that country. In the past we just said, "Well, here's the product and everyone has to sell it in every country". It's not working like that any more.

It goes back to the earliest days of the

Amstrad's British boss, Barry Young: "We're going to be a key player worldwide"

company. We've always shown a remarkable awareness for what the public wants and how much they are prepared to pay. As we expand into worldwide markets this doesn't work so easily. Every country has its own quirks.

The life cycle of our products is just unbelievable. Take the word processing side for instance. When we launched the PCW 8256 it went off like a steam train, then the 8512 came out and everyone said the 8256 would be discontinued. But it wasn't. It's still selling well. When the 9512 came along with a daisywheel printer everyone said that it was the end of the other two. I think in a lot of companies those products would have been discontinued, but every month we can predict fairly accurately how many we're going to sell.

There seems to be a shortage of some machines, such as the PC1512.
Well, they aren't that readily available at the moment. We've had a few but they're all going out. We sold to our yearly budget by the end of November.

Talking of old machines, what about the CPC? There were some rumours that it would be scrapped.
The CPC is still selling extremely well this Christmas. It's far from dead, far from it. The same was forecast about the Spectrum. Last year all the pundits were forecasting that the Sinclair Spectrum would be dead. Far from it – we've reached a situation where we've already sold all the Spectrums we had hoped to sell this year. The experts say these machines are dead, but that's not what the public are saying.

They're like the Volkswagen Beetle. The thing was old fashioned, but people get a level of confidence in something that's been around a long time.

How many Amstrad computers will be bought this Christmas?
Many, many tens of thousands.

Is there going to be a CPC-based games console? (*Express* 47)
I don't make that decision. Group will come to me and say, "Here's a new product do you want to sell it?" and we'll say yes or no. [Readers can take this as a 'no comment'. Young will certainly be aware of all possible forthcoming products.]

How easy is it to run a company which handles everything from the Speccy to 386 PCs?
I don't think running any company is that easy, especially when it gets to the size of Amstrad with its diversity of products. The knack is to have a broad distribution base to be able to support the products, and to be able to advertise properly. If we put the Spectrum on television it will sell, and the same with the CPC, the 9512 and the PC2000. Television has created so much demand it's unbelievable. We're gratified that we've had that much response.

What about the PC200? It seems to have had a poor reception.
I don't think we can put the PC200 down as being one of our most successful products. I don't know whether the concept was a mistake or whether we didn't really get behind it with the same aggression as we did with other products. Perhaps there was some confusion because, price-wise, it was bracketed in with the PC1512.

It's difficult. The only thing I remember from when we first launched the PC200 [September '88] was that all the people who were involved were tremendously enthusiastic about it and said what a good idea it was.

What is its future now?
Decisions are being made on its future. I can't talk about it at this moment in time.

Is there a chance that it will be pulled?
That's a possibility. [See *Express* 57.]

In the UK two machines are doing extremely well: the Atari ST and Commodore's Amiga. Amstrad doesn't really have anything in that area, why not?
I don't think we particularly see the need. When you say they are doing well; is that in units or profits? [Young is presumably referring to loss-making quarters recently announced by Commodore and Atari].

There was a lot of fuss when you exchanged the hard disks in the PC2000s. How difficult a decision was that to make?
Very hard. It was an Amstrad decision that was truthful and honest. We said: "Right, we have a problem. Let's set it right."

Was it a successful operation?
We had a lot of letters from people saying that it was a wonderful thing that we had done. That cheered us up in the morning. Then you'd open up the papers and someone was slagging you off.

The papers loved you for a long while.
Memories are quite short. If you go back to the overheating bits on the 1512, we took a knocking in the press then. But at the end of the day people can turn round and say: "OK, they've had their problems. But, my God, they've been successful."

What will Amstrad be doing in 10 years time?
Communications, the whole lot. That's the way things are moving. We're going to be a key player worldwide. Look at the way the machines are going, the speed. There's an awful lot to go for. People don't want to wait for these things, they want them now. We want to get to the next stage.

What about the next 12 months. Will they be good?
These last six months have been pretty good. We've taken some blows but we've moved a lot of products. I'm confident about the period January to June for the business products. That sector is more and more important to the company.

Alan Sugar will make the decisions about where the profits are. For example, I'm sure if there could have been profits in car telephones we would have been in that business. But you can almost get them for free now. I saw a packet of mints the other day with a voucher on the back for a car telephone. A box of mints!

What's Sugar like to work for?
I think he's great. Like all entrepreneurs there is something very different about him. He has presence and authority. He really gets people going and he can motivate people without being aware of it. If I have to motivate people it has to be conscious decision, but Alan can just call a meeting and everyone's up there. He's great.■

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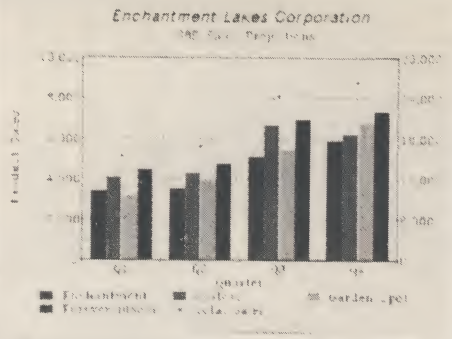
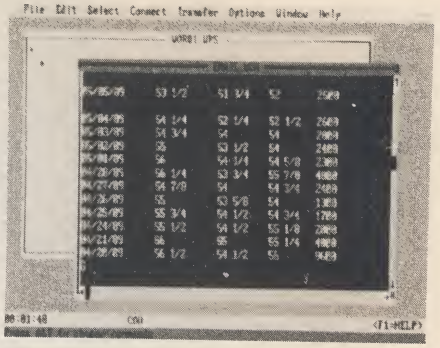


• Works' spreadsheet has an integrated charting option, and the charts can be placedinto a word processor document



• A communications section allows you access to the outside world – if you have a modem

THE WORKS OUTING

MicroSoft's multi-functional business software claims that no experience is necessary to use its database, word processor, speadsheet and comms software. Stuart Anderton put it to the test.

Any newcomer to business computing on the PC will be bewildered by the vast range of software designed to help them be more efficient in running their firm.

Equally, they will more than likely be confused by the nature of the software itself – unfriendly commands, confusing displays and complex manuals are in the majority in the PC world. MicroSoft *Works* attempts to appeal to these poor souls by trying to include all the commonly used business software into one package, and making it so easy to use that, according to the box, no experience is necessary.

MicroSoft *Works* combines a word processor, database, spreadsheet, charting program and a communication system in one package. It is the way that these functions are unified which makes *Works* a very productive system. With normal programs, to change between a word processor and a database – to check an address say – requires quitting the word processor, loading the database, importing the file, saving the relevant part to disk, quitting the database, re-loading the word processor, loading the text file you were working on, and, finally, importing the address from the disk. The same action in *Works* takes four mouse clicks and about as many seconds.

Data can be transferred from any section of the program to any other – facts from the database can be moved to the spreadsheet and manipulated, charted, and finally added in to a word processed document.

Another very strong area of *Works* is the user interface. *Works* uses a windows, icons, menus and pointers (WIMP) system to control most of its functions, and, if you have a mouse, operating it is intuitive and obvious. Mouse-free micros can still use all the menus with the aid of the [ALT] key. Perhaps surprisingly, MicroSoft, the publisher of the top PC WIMP system Windows, has chosen not to use it for *Works,* favouring instead a cut-down text version. I suspect that this is so XT-clone owners (that's you with the PC1640s and PC1512s) can use the system at a reasonable speed, but full Windows would have been nice as an additional option.

HELP ON HAND

The comprehensive help system is one of the first things you notice about *Works*. On-line help systems are, thankfully, becoming common, and reaching for [F1] will shed light on most programs' workings. *Works* on the other hand goes one beyond this and offers not only on-line help but on-line tutorials. If you are confused by what is happening, hitting [F1] will bring up a menu of topics you might want assistance with. The program is intelligent about what you want, and will automatically offer you help with whatever command you just tried to issue. If this is not enough for you, clicking Tutorial will give you an animated interactive lesson in whatever subject you were stuck on. An amazingly useful feature for beginners.

Works has a built-in calculator and alarm clock, you can format disks and copy or delete files, and if there's anything else you need to do you can run other programs direct from *Works* and return as if nothing had happened. MicroSoft has tried to think of everything and has largely succeeded. Let's take a function-by-function look at what *Works* has to offer.

THE WORD PROCESSOR

Like all the parts of *Works,* the word processor can be switched between graphics and text modes. In graphics mode you can choose between 25 and 43 lines of text being displayed (on a high-resolution mono system) and effects like underline and italic are correctly shown on screen. In text mode the display is updated faster and scrolling is noticeably swifter.

You have complete control over the formatting of the text: font, size, style, margins, tabs... everything is easily set up. Headers and footers can be added for long documents, and borders can be printed out to surround the text. *Works* drives the printer in graphics mode, so excellent NLQ quality is possible, even with the cheapest printers.

The built in spelling checker is fast, and there is a useful thesaurus for finding synonyms instantly. There is only one major problem with this word processor – the lack of a word counter is a pain for a writer who is working to a fixed length.

THE DATABASE

Databases always disagree with me. They are horrendous beasts that send me back to paper filing every time. I am pleased to report, therefore, that I managed to successfully make a query of one of the example files without even reading the manual. This is an achievement. Getting a report out of the software was harder, but the single commonest use of the database, to produce labels and letters, is remarkably easy, and can in fact be done from within the word processor.

The database is probably the weakest part of *Works,* but it's good enough to maintain address records and a simple inventory. However, count it out for complex data management tasks.

THE SPREADSHEET

The spreadsheet part of *Works* clearly owes a lot to its grown up sister, *Excel,* and is much more powerful than you might expect in a package of this kind.

Having a WIMP system speeds up moving around a spreadsheet enormously – being able to point at a cell to edit it is a luxury after using text-based systems. There is a comprehensive array of statistical analysis functions built in to *Works* that will make a businessperson's life easier. Features like automatic depreciation calculations, net present value, annuity value, compound interest and the rest will make tax calculations a doddle.

When you have set up your data you can graph it with the built-in charting software. Line, bar and pie charts can be chosen and labelled in any font or style. Making a chart is as easy as pointing to the data you want the program to use. The completed charts can be imported into a word processor document and scaled to fit, producing professional-looking reports.

THE COMMS SYSTEM

This is the part of *Works* you will probably use least. It lets you control a modem to log on to on-line services and to send and receive documents to other modem owners.

It uses the XModem file transfer system, so it should be possible to download files from most bulletin boards, but the lack of the 1200/75 split baud rate means that Prestel is out. Of course to use the comms at all you need to buy a modem.

THE VERDICT

Works is an accomplished suite of programs that are integrated together very well. The WIMP interface makes it easy and relaxing to use, and the on-line help is second to none. The functions it offers are powerful for the price – I have given up using *WordPerfect,* a £500 word processor, since *Works* arrived.

If you need business software that is easy to use but fully featured, look to *Works.*■

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This week Rob Ainsley answers your letters

Class of the Z80s

As a former 8-bitter and one year 16-bitter, I felt shocked at Mr. Voons' opinions (*Express* 55) on his vision of the perfect computer. How can he justify his reasons that the Z80, an obsolete processor, could be at the heart of a 90s micro?

His only favourable point for 16-bits over the 8-bit was speed. This is not the only point, but the only one he supplied. Also in the 16-bit's ball-park are faster address accessing, higher clock speed and better facility for handling large numbers.

And what about fractals? (A subject much in vogue.) The handling of these, and indeed anything that requires considerable number-crunching, is on the whole better with bigger data-width.

Software movability would best be done like IBM with their 8086, 80286, etc. series.
Darren Spragg, Walsall, West Midlands

Well, it depends on what you want to do with your micro. If you just want to word process, run simple spreadsheets and databases and aren't too bothered about graphics, then the 8-bit machines – Spectrum, PCW, CPC, C64 *et al* – seem to me to be perfectly capable of handling the jobs you will need from them, now or in 1999.

Sure, if you want to use up-market art packages, run very complex spreadsheets or enjoy state-of-the-art graphic games, then you'd need a 16- or 32-bit machine like the ST, Amiga or Archie.

I wouldn't say that a Z80 machine would be a good general basis for a 1990s upmarket machine, but it certainly ain't obsolete – it depends on the use. People slagging off the SAM tend to forget that it is a product aimed at a specific market. It's not competing with an ST or Amiga, but creating a niche of its own.

Sub Standard?

Apart from getting a few free issues, is there any advantage in subscribing to your magazine? I think not. Subscribing only seems to insure that I get my copy after its been in the shops for a few days.

I was charging around the hallowed halls of Alexandra Palace on the Wednesday of this year's PC show and I came across your stand, complete with the week's edition of *Express*. But I hadn't received my copy yet.

Rather than wasting money, I waited patiently for my copy. That Friday it dutifully flopped through the post box, complete with a floor plan, and a few pages detailing who was exhibiting where at the show.

And three weeks ago a friend rang me up: "Hey, Ahmad, have you heard about the A5000 supporting ARM3?".

"Ermm... no, not quite", I replied sheepishly.

"Well how could you miss it? It's all over the *Express* cover," he continued. Simple, I hadn't got my copy yet.

But the last straw was when I saw (and partially read) issue 56 in a local shop, on Thursday 30th of November, and received my copy on Saturday 2nd December.

From that point on I've been walking into newsagents, and reading bits of the magazine, a day before I receive my copy, since it's a difficult to talk to one's micro-hack friends when you haven't got a clue about what's going on, *Express*-wise that is.

It might be a better idea for me to cancel my subscription, pay a little more money, have the magazine a little earlier and, in the case of PC-show issues, obtain the magazine when certain articles (like floor plans), are actually of some use.
Ahmad FS Alam, Old Trafford, Manchester

Hmm. *Express* is sent to the printers on Monday, comes back sometime on Tuesday, and is in the shops on Thursday (Wednesday in some parts of London). The subscription copies go out from Somerton, in Somerset, on the Wednesday morning, first class, and so should reach you in the next morning's post.

As the Post Office can only get half of first class mail delivered by the next day for non short-haul mail according to *Which?* magazine (and this disgraceful state of affairs is the ultimate responsibility of the Government, incidentally), it is quite clearly the culprit. We can do just as little about it as you, I'm afraid.

Chaos from order

I see with more and more frequency letters complaining about mail order software companies.

Many of the victims write into the magazine that they saw the advert in, hoping that the magazine can do something to help. More often than not the magazine is itself a victim, with the mail order outfit defaulting on its payments for page space.

The whole sordid business seems to be abnormally widespread – and it appears to be out of context with the size of the industry as a whole.

But I also believe that software brokers who wring hands and say that the victim should have brought custom to the honest firms first and none of the nasty business would have happened etc. is a cop-out. Surely the good companies could set up a guild to protect the good and honest reputation that they have worked so hard to build up – this would also serve to protect the customers, who at present take a fair chance that their cash is going to do a runner along with some 'fly-by-night' dealer.

Keep up the good work with the magazine. Being informed on a weekly basis is definitely better than waiting a month.
David P Hackett, Penilee, Glasgow

Thanks for your comments, which I quite agree with – I'd be interested to hear from some of the established mail order houses on this.

Astronomically bad

About the *Galaxy* entry in the PC Essentials guide in *Express* 55. Not only have you described this excellent word processor as public domain software, but you have also stated that it is free! It is neither.
Michael Payne, Hayling Island, Hampshire

Well, the one is a consequence of the other, so don't try to make out it's two mistakes!

Sorry, this one slipped through. The word processing buyer's guide a couple of weeks before correctly described the program as being shareware, available free on trial but for £42 should you wish to buy it (and hence get technical support, documentation etc). You can get *Galaxy* from Shareware Marketing on 0297 24088.

One horse stand

Having declared my faith some years ago in MSX, by paying £300 for a Sony HitBit at launch, you can understand my reluctance to rush out and upgrade to an Amiga or ST. I doubt if I could even give my computer away! No offence to other MSX users, but the expression 'flogging a dead horse' comes to mind.

Indeed, your magazine has been the only means by which I have retained an interest in computing (initially for the MSX section) and may it long continue, (unlike *MSX User*, *What MSX*, *MSX Computing* etc). But I have decided to purchase an Amiga in the new year, and to the ongoing Amiga/ST debate I would simply add that at least the Amiga isn't Japanese.

As a final comment, I find the prices asked for second hand computers in your ad section ridiculous. In some cases it is cheaper to buy the same computer new as take a secondhand one (without guarantee) off one of your many hopefuls.

Perhaps you would exclude those advertising unreasonable offers.
Jim McAreavy, Dumfries, Scotland

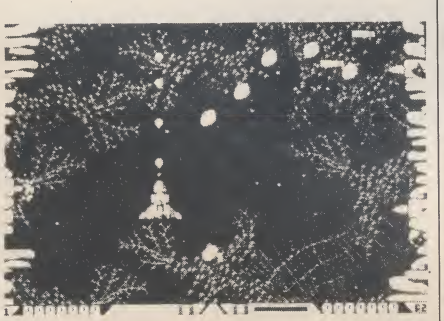
Well, we're planning on supporting the MSX column just as long as the readers want, so you can look forward to the 1990s without fear.

I suppose because people can place ads free (or at least, for the price

Youngest ever

I would like to know if any other eight-year-old has finished *Xenon 2*? I finished the game on December 12th this year.
John Hopton, Kellington, Goole, Humberside

Any offers? How about the youngest person to have visited all 10^{34} worlds in *Federation of Free Traders*?



• *Any eight-year-olds through Xenon II?*

of a stamp) in Shopping Express, they think they may as well go for the highest price they can. Of course there are some incredible bargains to be found too, given a little hunting! I don't think we could reasonably exclude some adverts because we thought they were asking too much. If people want to waste their time advertising something they'll never sell, with value dropping all the time they're not selling it, then more fool them.

PD principle

Further to your comment to Neil Mansell's letter in issue No. 56 on a PD section, yes, yes, a thousand times yes. ST specific, or PC if you have to.

Geoff Hockney, Seaford, East Sussex

I just read that you wanted more letters about public domain programs, and that you might start a special PD section in the magazine if enough people wrote. Here is at least one letter. I think it is a perfect topic, especially for this kind of magazine since it is so up-to-date, and if you would include a column or two about newly-released PD software, I am sure even more people would buy the magazine.

The problem with PD programs is that it is very hard to know which programs are good and which are not. Your magazine could keep the readers up to date about what programs are released, and which are worth looking for.

I am also very concerned about the high price of PD disks. Nowadays every magazine is packed with advertisements from companies selling PD disks for the ridiculously high price of £3 each. A disk costs less than £1, a Jiffy bag, big enough for 10 disks, costs 25p, and the stamp around 34p. If a person ordered 10 disks, the company would get an income of £30, and a cost of 10+0.25+0.34=£10.59. This means that the company would earn £19.41 just for a few minutes of work (if putting some disks into a computer can be called work!).

There is usually a lot of talk about software companies ripping off the customers, and earning big bucks. I am not so sure about this since I know how long it takes to code a program, but what about the PD companies? They sell, with huge profit, other peoples programs which were meant to be spread free of charge. I and hundreds of other PD programmers did not spend our free time to produce free quality software so that greedy PD companies would earn a lot of money.

There exists, however, one place where you can get as many PD disks (Amiga) you want, free of charge. You only need to send your own disks plus a SAE. If anyone is interested in PD programs, I would recommend joining ICPUG.

You not only get free access to the PD library, but you also receive a newsletter every second month etc. Write to: Jack Cohen, ICPUG Membership Secretary, 30 Brancaster Road, Newbury Park, Ilford, Essex. IG2 7EP

Anders Bjerin, Richmond, Surrey

You left out the costs of advertising, which can be a lot more than you think. (How much do you think it costs for a half page in a weekly magazine? – No, it's more than that). Then there's the cost of producing catalogues, getting the latest stuff in from America etc. I don't think anyone's making a fortune out of PD, but I'm sure some people are making a bit too much.

Anyway, about the column: we're thinking about it.

Hack attack

If Emma Nicholson had written the Comment in *Express* 56 I could have understood it, but the news editor, that's a laugh. If I had read it in the *Sun* or the *Star* I would have understood, but to read it in *Express* – it's a joke.

Point 1. "Sneaking into someone's computer system and having a good look at what's on offer." Anyone with private documents in computer files should have more sense than to leave their computers switched on and connected to the public telephone. To do so is equivalent of leaving a manuscript in a public library.

Point 2. To suggest that Emma Nicholson "latched onto hacking" is correct. More to the point is that Emma Nicholson jumped on the band wagon, and if anyone takes the time to listen to what she has to say on the subject, it soon becomes apparent.

Point 3. Any suggestion that the tabloids have approached the subject with any degree of intelligence is in itself an insult to anyone's intelligence.

Point 4. Speculation that "hacking will eventually cause a calamity and even loss of life" is something I would expect to read in the *Sun* or *Star* and not a computer magazine. There is more danger from computer operators and computer journalists.

Remember the old saying 'A little knowledge is a dangerous thing'? Well please tell Emma Nicholson and Colin Campbell. Finally it is bad journalism that gets the hobby of computing a bad name. So when next you talk about the freedom of the press, think about freedom of the computer.

I have not given my name and address because Big Brother is watching me and you.

Anon

Your point 1 is the product of a faulty mind. Trying to blame the victim whose data has been tampered with is nonsense. The practicalities of most business computers mean that they have to be networked and switched on, linked up to phone lines, 24 hours a day.

Setting up computers so that they are un-hackable is very expensive in terms of hardware software, and most importantly the time that experienced computing system managers have to put in to prevent this opportunist desecration of private property.

Talking about the 'freedom of the computer' is simple-minded wibble too; it's like saying the drunken driver has a right to roam the highways causing mayhem, or that prospective burglars have every right to wander around your house looking for valuable things for them to nick.

Of course you're welcome to your opinion and are free to disagree with Colin's eminently well-argued and informed piece. Whether a little knowledge is a dangerous thing or not depends, of course, on how you use it. But it's better than having no knowledge at all – and writing anonymous letters to magazines spouting off your ideas.

2p or not 2p

Just thought I'd drop you a note with a list of what to do with the 2p piece I end up with after buying my *Express* each week.

1. Save them up over a 29 week period and claim a bonus *Express* from an irate newsagent.

2. Glue them together then punch a hole down the centre and replace lead water pipes with them.

3. Fill pockets with them and rattle them in lifts.

4. Throw them in the air, film the result, digitise the frames and call it an Amiga demo.

5. Save them up for 24 years and buy one game.

6. Save them to buy stamps and write to *Express* every 10 weeks.

7. Use them as an excuse to write daft lists to *Express* in the hope of winning the mystery prize.

Matthew Miller, York, N Yorkshire

You could throw them in a wishing well and wish that we'd make the *Express* cover price an even 50p. Anyone else got any listings? Send them in.■

Bust up over ghost writing: the programmers speak out

Following our discussion in last week's Comment column of the behind-the-scenes row between EMAP and Activision over ACE's *review of* Ghostbusters II, *the game's programmers, Foursfield, have invited us to print the following open letter to the* ACE *editor on the subject:*

After five years in the games writing business from *Kayleth* through *I.S.S.* (a game which you *Ace*-Rated and feature in your pink pages each month, but sold diddlysquat!) we have learnt to be tolerant of all reviews, good and bad.

We realise and accept that an opinion of a game is a very personal view. It can be hard on occasion, when a project such as *Ghostbusters II* – written in six months from the script, without benefit of the film, which was still in production when we set to work – is thrashed so soundly. But there you go!

However, we feel we would like to point out a few innacuracies in your review.

The Amiga version runs on two disks, not three as stated. Perhaps your reviewer, not up on the programming side, has difficulty with this. As a guideline, two is generally identified in the following manner: hold a disk in each hand. If there are no disks left in the box, then you have two disks to play with! Easy.

The Atari ST runs on four single-sided disks. We could have produced two double-sided disks, but this would not have been helpful to those owners of single-sided drives. But one can't assume the reviewer would see this difficulty.

We also wonder about the comment that "The sound is very impressive sampled stuff – the *Ghostbusters* theme", and yet rates 0 in the rating box. Perhaps this discrepancy is indicative of the review, or perhaps it isn't – who knows?

May all of the team at Foursfield take this opportunity to wish you all a happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year. No doubt we will meet again in the review columns of 1990!

A note to Gary, who I am led to believe actually wrote the review. My real name appears at the bottom of this letter, and in the spirit of free speech I would assume you will print this letter in full. If one is confident that one is speaking the truth, one does not need to adopt an alias.

Anna Ufnowska, Foursfield.

• Ghostbusters II – *it is at the centre of controversy*

It's all gone quiet over at both EMAP and Activision on this one – a sign, one hopes, that some sort of truce has broken out. Anna is quite right in recognising that reviewers' opinions will differ – witness the apparent disagreement between our CPC column last week and ST column this week on the very game in question. Beyond making this observation, we're sure we can leave ACE to speak for itself.

Martyn Lester

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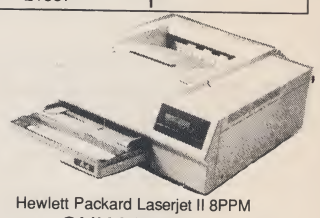

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TEN THINGS THIS PAGE IS BUYING for famous people for Christmas

10 US President George Bush – *AIQ,* the program that generates random English sentences, to write better speeches for him
20 Anyone with a car in Czechoslovakia or East Germany – A European version of *Autoroute* to provide them with the quickest route into West Germany
30 Erik Honecker and the sacked East German Cabinet – How about a nostalgic bit of *Tetris,* the wall building game?
40 Salman Rushdie – The Atari Portfolio pocket PC, for computing on the move
50 The Cabinet – An Opus Datasafe PC, to stop any more embarrassing secrets leaking out of how companies shortly to be privatised have been shored up with taxpayers' money
60 The 650 MPs of England, Scotland and Wales – One of Wrexham council's computerised talking litter bins - to talk rubbish back to them
70 Rupert Murdoch – A spreadsheet, to let him calculate how much he's losing a week on Sky TV (one that can cope with over six figures)
80 The newly-privatised water boards — A statistics package, to let them analyse tap water properly
90 Graham Gooch – A copy of CRL's game Dracula for the England tour to the West Indies – then at least he'll have one good bat in the side
100 The Rt Hon Mrs Margaret Hilda Thatcher – *PEP* – the Personality Evaluation Package. Programs never lie...

TEN PROGRAMS that come on a lot of disks

10 Indiana Jones – One of the new breed of graphic adventures which on the ST version takes up five disks. And you thought those old Spectrum cassettes were a pain to load...
20 Studio 8 – Paint program, possibly the biggest on the Mac, that takes up 6 disks
30 Aldus PageMaker – Apparently a measly eight disks for this PC program, but as they're all 1.2Mb ones, it's a great deal more in real terms
40 Microsoft Works – New PC version squeezed on to a mere 11 disks, but because installation might be thereby made too easy, it requires you to insert disk 2 first, then disk 5, then disk 3, then...
50 WordPerfect – The new version of the PC standard word processor takes up 12 disks, and prompted one disgruntled user of an earlier version to complain "they've said, what we have here is a really good bicycle, so let's put 13 more wheels on it"
60 Microsoft Word – 13 disks: unlucky for some. Especially if your PC disk box only holds a dozen
70 King James Bible – PD versions take up five 5.25-inch disks for the Old and four for the New Testament, plus five disks for the Bible Reader and three more for a Gospel concordance – total for the package 17. A two-disk Bible Quiz is also available
80 dBase IV – Almost getting the record with so many disks that you'd probably need a dBase application for your PC to keep tabs on them – 19
90 WordStar – The daddy of all the word processors comes on a whopping 21 disks, meaning installation on your PC takes anything up to half a day
100 Mahabhatara – The Indian poem, the longest in the world, is the equivalent of the Bible but 15 times longer and would presumably therefore take up 135 disks – over 100Mb – if it were available on PD.

TEN STRANGE BUGS

10 Autoroute – The PC route planner for drivers had a bug in early versions that made it show the distance from Southampton to the Isle of Wight as being 323 miles
20 WordStar IV – Supposedly configured especially for the PCW, prints out £ signs as 1
30 Elite – In ST version 1.01 your space ship can retro-rocket right back through the space station from whence it just took off without a scratch
40 Kick Off – Anco's footie sim has several bugs on the ST, among which is the annoying tendency of the player throwing in to throw it behind himself, out of play, stopping the game
50 Interceptor – The classic flight sim lets you land on the enemy carrier, get re-fuelled and re-armed even if you are hit, and repeat this as many times as you like
60 Bard's Tale II – On the Amiga, the Druid can play his tunes even when dead
70 MacWrite II – The upgrade to the popular Macintosh word processor can't be read by any major desktop publishing packages such as the state-of-the-art *Xpress,* written by Quark. *MacWrite II* was written by Quark
80 Daley Thompson's Decathlon – If you can record a time of over 999 seconds, the clock resets to 0, letting you achieve times even Ben Johnson couldn't match
90 Protext – In the Amiga word processor, ALT plus D inserts the current date. Unless you do a spell check, when the date suddenly becomes yesterday
100 Mini Office Professional Plus Professional Office Plus Mini – Version 1 on the PCW had an anagram utility that gave all the possible anagrams of a sequence you typed in - and gave each answer twice

TEN SOUNDS the Apple Macintosh can be made to make instead of just beeping

10 "Bleeeeuuurrrghhhh!" – When you insert a disk of the wrong format
20 "Ahh, it's so big" – Breathy female voice greets disk insertion
30 20th Century Fox theme tune – Plays on starting up, lasts 15 seconds and uses up 250K of the hard disk
40 "Sorry Dave, I can't do that" – HAL's voice from *2001: A Space Odyssey* admonishes you when you try to take some illegal option on a menu
50 "Illogical, captain" – Spock's voice is an alternative to 40
60 "He's dead, Jim" – Another Star Trek sample that could be used for insertion of a duff disk
70 EastEnders theme tune - No-one has thought of a suitable situation to us it in, but somebody probably will
80 "You silly sod!" – From Monty Python and The Holy Grail; can be used in all sorts of situations
90 "Not me, you knucklehead! I'm the captain!" – Dick Dastardly's sampled voice from Spot the Pigeon has absolutely no meaningful applications but is a nostalgic favourite for some of the more elderly users
100 Tarzan's cry – The original was said to be culled together from the cries of apes, a slowed-down soprano singing a high C, and a cello played backwards. The sampled version of it can now play when your Mac starts up.

NEXT WEEK

TWELVE MONTHS IN COMPUTING
The games, the machines, the joy, the pain , the bugs of 1989. We review the key events of the last year in the computing calendar

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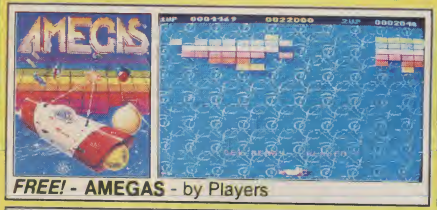
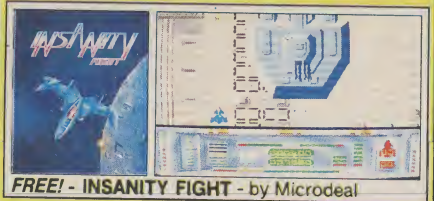


FREE! - AMEGAS - by Players



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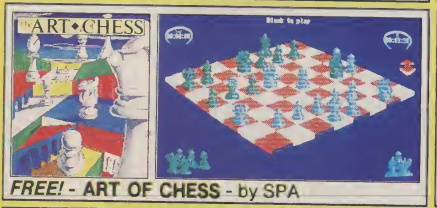

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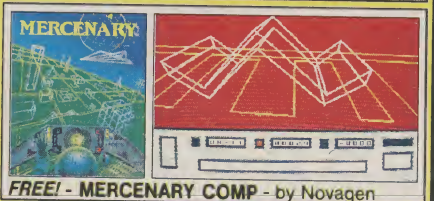

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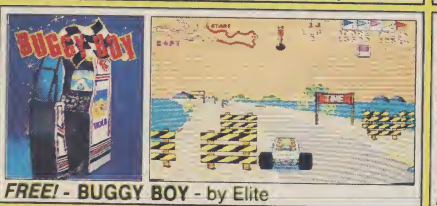

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